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WILLIAM MORRIS

*THE MARXIST DREAMER*



# WILLIAM MORRIS

## *THE MARXIST DREAMER*

PAUL MEIER

VOLUME ONE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY  
FRANK GUBB

WITH A PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION BY  
ROBIN PAGE ARNOT

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*Notes to the Text*

## *Dedication*

The English-language edition of this book is  
dedicated with warm affection  
and sincere thanks

TO

RAY WATKINSON

friend to the author, translator and  
publisher, whose infectious enthusiasm,  
commitment, wit and learning have helped  
the work at every stage and have meant a  
very great deal to us all

## Preface

The description of British poets and artists of the mid- and late nineteenth century as examples of an advanced and progressive culture was a fancy picture. It was belied in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* by the short shrift given to the democratic poetry of Robert Burns and the total omission of the revolutionary democrat William Blake. Apart from a very few, the Victorians with great names reflected the outlook and the prejudices of the middle class; and in nothing so much as in their disdain of the working class. From the day when the laureate Wordsworth smashed his staff in a rage on being told that the Chartist leader, John Frost, was not to be hanged, right on to the laureate Tennyson, aghast if 'Russia bursts our Indian barrier' and if war or peace be settled by the votes of the newly enfranchised agricultural labourers, there is steady access of class bias.

But then came the manifold craftsman, artist and poet, William Morris, who plunged into political activity to stop 'an unjust war' by his appeal 'To the Working Men of England' (11 May 1877). In this he asked if they realised 'the bitterness of hatred against freedom and progress that lies at the hearts of the richer classes of this country'. 'These men', he says, 'would deliver you bound hand and foot forever to irresponsible capital'. A dozen years later Morris, leader of the Socialist League, is at the founding congress of the Socialist International; and in 1890 in *Commonweal* of which he had for five years been the editor, he writes serially *News from Nowhere, or an epoch of rest, being some chapters from a utopian romance*. Very soon *News from Nowhere* was translated into the main languages of Europe.

Paul Meier, the distinguished scholar, who in 1961 published the best French translation (*Nouvelles de nulle part*, Editions Sociales, Paris) has since turned his attention to more fundamental studies of the utopian thinking of Morris, on which there appeared in October 1972 a volume in three parts – *La Pensée Utopique de William Morris*. This had an immediate impact in North America and in the United Kingdom from whose presses there have issued in the last five years many publications to swell the torrent of books about Morris that have appeared at the rate of about one a year throughout this century. Now, skilfully translated by my Sydenham neighbour, Frank Gubb, Paul Meier's book appears in English under the title *William Morris the Marxist Dreamer*.

In a Foreword to Part II, Dr Meier has explained how his studies, which are penetrating and profound, inclined him to think that the main inspiration and starting point of the Morris utopia was to be sought in the teaching of Karl Marx. He was then to find that with two notable exceptions (one in 1955 and another back in 1934) critics 'were almost unanimous in declaring that William



Morris was the opposite of a Marxist'. To track down, analyse and explode these mistaken notions now became a task additional to the great work Meier had set himself. These notions, rife enough in the forty years that followed the death of Morris, might well have ceased after 1936, in which year Bernard Shaw, who had worked with Morris and had known him as 'the greatest poet and the greatest prose writer of the reign of Queen Victoria', made the authoritative declaration that 'Morris stood for Karl Marx *contra mundum*'; but the 'mistaken notions' persisted. The fact has to be faced that in this century literary and political criticism had become an Augean stable of filth and fantasies about William Morris: and Paul Meier has put us all under a debt by his undertaking to cleanse the stable and destroy much of the rubbish. Not only has he done this conclusively, but in so doing has performed another signal service – of demonstrating Morris's almost totally undervalued power as a theorist.

Robin Page Arnot  
Sydenham, July 1977

## *Introduction*

One may well wonder whether it was necessary to devote yet another book, and one of this bulk, to William Morris. Hundreds of books and articles have, over nearly eighty years, recounted his life and described his many activities. Innumerable critical judgements have been made of him, and their diversity is truly astonishing. It must be admitted that this voluminous literature, taken together, has long been very uneven in quality and often suspiciously subjective. A more serious point is that the poet and artist has been, in a restricted view, exalted, while a modest veil has been cast over his ideology and political life, these being regarded as of minor importance, a little embarrassing, or even as a regrettable waste of energy. This has resulted in a blurring of the image of Morris and a lack of understanding of his art itself, the deepest intentions and true significance of which have been ignored or distorted. The few books devoted to his socialism have scarcely been satisfactory. Bruce Glasier's account was deliberately mealy-mouthed and reassuring, teeming with assertions of dubious veracity. In France, Edouard Guyot's study was, for a long time, the only honest analysis, but it was brief and superficial. For long years the only fundamental document available to critics was the biography published in 1898 by J. W. Mackail; it is still irreplaceable today, but is, all the same, wilfully fragmentary and tendentious.

Moreover, Morris's Complete Works were not published until very late, between 1910 and 1915, and we had to wait until 1936 for the publication by his daughter May of the two supplementary volumes containing some of his most significant writings. May's introduction and commentaries accompanying these volumes represented a considerable advance upon earlier literature and provided a mass of precious facts, but the basic problems were scarcely indicated. Since then, very slowly, unpublished works are finding their way to the presses. A certain number of Morris's letters were collected in 1950 by Philip Henderson and some more in 1951 by R. Page Arnot, but a mass of correspondence still lies sleeping in library boxes and private collections in every corner of Europe and the United States.<sup>1</sup> Finally, ten further lectures, hitherto only available at the British Museum, were published by Professor Eugene D. Le Mire of Wayne State University, first in 1962 as a typewritten thesis, and in 1969 as a printed volume; the latter has a different and much shorter introduction.

These long delays explain in part the shortcomings of criticism over many years, but only in part. It was only in 1934 that R. Page Arnot, in a slim pamphlet of 30 pages, did pioneer work in drawing attention to the Marxist inspiration of Morris's socialism. These short, incisive pages were a revelation.

Since, and stemming from it, there has appeared a masterly work by E. P. Thompson: *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1958). This volume of more than 900 pages constitutes the most detailed biography that could be desired and describes with noteworthy intelligence Morris's literary, artistic, political and ideological evolution. It is a fundamental work to which we must continually refer and without which the present study would have been impossible. The labour carried out by E. P. Thompson is usefully supplemented by A. L. Morton's more general studies in English utopias and, in Czechoslovakia, the more literary ones of Jessie Kocmanova. Books which have appeared since, apart from Professor Le Mire's thesis, add little to our knowledge of Morris's thought.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, all has not been said. While it may be readily admitted that *News from Nowhere* is the writer's most popular and representative work, it does not seem to have been the best understood. Critics have been unanimous in appreciating its poetry and charm, but few among them have turned to its content, unless to look upon Morris's utopia with amused indulgence. Few among them have seen it as serious thought and none has yet undertaken to set the ideas which stem from it side by side with all the similar ideas scattered throughout his whole work and which constitute a body of thought of extraordinary richness. Such is the ambition of the present work, and despite my efforts to embrace all aspects of Morris's anticipatory thinking, I am not convinced that this vast subject is exhausted.

E. P. Thompson's monumental and inestimable study is a historian's work, and I sincerely believe that it is impossible to write a single line more in definition of Morris's socialism, its characteristics and its development. The mistake (which often happens) would be to confuse his socialism with his utopian thinking, that is, his conception of a society to come and of the future of mankind. These two aspects of his ideology clearly overlap and are inconceivable apart from each other, but utopianism is not merely political thinking, but also philosophical, economic, aesthetic, moral, social and historical thinking, which, in Morris's case, takes on dimensions distinctly more vast than in previous utopian systems. I felt that an investigation of this kind was worth undertaking.

It has imposed its own strict discipline. Anything not having direct bearing upon utopia is excluded from the scope of our study. I only have recourse to biography (what more remains to be said after Thompson?) to the extent to which it provides explanations, nor is there any question of going over the same ground by relating Morris's life of militancy. Nor do we study his immense work as decorator, and I only refer to it to extract the aesthetic theories involved in his looking forward. I refer to his poems and romances only when they contain a germ or extension of a utopian idea. Our attention is above all directed towards his theoretical writings, lectures, articles, treatises and, of course, his stories, such as *A Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*, which are the tangible illustrations of this thought. But (and it is, I am well aware, an enormous pity) I have refused to allow myself to be drawn into the smallest literary digression: despite my eagerness not to lose any nuance of this rich and complex thought, I have resisted the constant temptation to enjoy its forms of expression.

Alongside this thematic limitation stands a chronological limitation.



William Morris only came to socialism around the age of 50, and his utopian thought only took full wing with the development of his theoretical education. In fact, his utopianism offers the greater interest for being an expression of full maturity. It existed, surely, in embryonic forms (already fairly well-defined, moreover, on the aesthetic plane) in the work of his earlier years, and we take note of this. But, in fact, our study is logically concentrated upon the writings subsequent to 1880.

Even restricted in this way, the study which I initially projected proved to be too vast and too ambitious for a single volume, and for the moment I have had to set aside two-thirds of it. In fact, every utopia takes as its starting point criticism and even rejection of contemporary ways and institutions. Utopia is primarily negation. Throughout Morris's writings we find a vibrant and many-pronged indictment of Victorian society, of its ugliness, its social injustice, its pretences and its hypocrisy. It is by setting off from this inhumanity that he defines the outlines of the finally human society of time to come. I have only kept a few rapid indispensable glimpses of this denunciation, and they are by no means sufficient to reveal its full extent. Nor, alas, is that all! Morris's utopia is not arbitrary and gratuitous, situated outside space and time. It sets off from a real situation in a real country and envisages a historical development founded upon a scientific theory. It includes in its foresight all the events separating the present moment from the stage finally described, and the major event is the social revolution which will open the new era. Contrary to all earlier utopists, Morris does not, in the words of Babeuf, leave 'his means blank'. Let us not forget that, at the time at which he was writing, the world had not yet seen any socialist revolution, and that, for him, there could be nothing but the foresight of his own brain. So we find him with a theory of revolution that is an integral part of his utopia. That, too, I lack space to study in the present work, which is confined entirely to an analysis of Morris's conception of future society. This work, then, presents a double gap and must be regarded as a fragment of a study yet to be completed. From all these limitations I have enumerated arises a danger of which I am only too well aware – that of giving an unduly narrow view of the prodigiously rich personality of William Morris. I am almost shamefaced about it and ask the reader to understand and forgive. I think that he will easily do so by appreciating, within the bounds enclosing our analysis, the extraordinary abundance of thought which close attention reveals.

However, an attitude consisting only of description and analysis would put us at great risk of staying on the surface. I had to understand. For that, I needed to bring out the ideology inspiring Morris's utopia, and the only way was to discover its sources and to define which, among the many influences bearing upon him, was the one which predominated, enveloping the rest. I wanted not to neglect any one of these factors and have tried to re-establish the complex tangle in which diversity tends towards unity. Along the road, I have had to sweep away an impressive range of legends and unjustified interpretations. The reader will realise that my task, throughout the present book, will have been to correct inexactitudes and denounce falsifications – deliberate or unconscious – which for decades entirely misrepresented Morris's thought. I know very well that it is difficult to cast off ready-made and assiduously taught ideas, and that I will be accused of having an axe to grind. My reply will be

that at no moment have I permitted myself the slightest arbitrary assertion and that each one is based upon precise references and upon the discoveries I have succeeded in making. No true research can be pacific.

I cannot conclude this preamble without expressing my gratitude to all those, men and women, who have provided help and support. It goes first to Monsieur J. J. Mayoux, professor at the Sorbonne, under whose direction the present work has been brought to its conclusion. He has shown rare understanding and been unsparing of encouragement. Thanks also to my very close friend, Monsieur Emile Bottigelli, whose twin skills as Germanist and editor of the works of Marx and Engels have sometimes saved me long research; he has authorised the reproduction, as an appendix, of two unpublished letters of which he possesses the originals. I owe a similar debt to Mr. Chimen Abramsky, of London, who has allowed me to give the reader the first sight of a precious unknown Morris manuscript. Similarly, I have been able to reproduce three other unpublished letters through the good offices of the Amsterdam Institute of Social History, the Moscow Institute of Marxism-Leninism and the Hammersmith Central Reference Department. I have had the benefit of a useful exchange of information with Monsieur J.-M. Baïssus, of the Faculté des Lettres of Montpellier, who is preparing an important work on William Morris as a writer; with Professor Norman Kelvin of New York City College, who is soon, I hope, to publish Morris's complete correspondence; with Professor B. G. Knepper of Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa, a specialist in the works of Bernard Shaw; with Mrs. Yvonne Kapp of London, an authority on Eleanor Marx-Aveling. Thanks are also due to the London Society of Antiquaries for allowing me to have microfilms made of unpublished manuscripts by William Morris and to the William Morris Society, whose eminent Secretary, Mr. R. C. H. Briggs, gave me a specially friendly welcome and arranged invaluable contacts. I owe to the Reverend N. Macdonald Ramm of Oxford and to the Reverend A. R. Staines of Bexleyheath information about useful biographical details contained in their parish registers. Finally, I wish to thank for their effective help the staffs of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the British Museum, the libraries of the Sorbonne, the William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the London School of Economics; adding a special thought for Miss M. W. H. Schreuder, who has charge of the Anglo-American section of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, thanks to whom I discovered the text (believed lost) of an important lecture by William Morris.

And may I end this introduction by expressing to my wife (to whom the original French edition of this book is dedicated) my deep gratitude for her practical and moral help, without which my task would have been impossible.

Let us try to take refuge behind Pisarev.

"There are rifts and rifts," wrote Pisarev of the rift between dream and reality. "My dream may run ahead of the natural march of events or may fly off at a tangent in a direction in which no natural march of events will ever proceed. In the first case my dream will not cause any harm; it may even support and augment the energy of the working man . . . There is nothing in such dreams that would distort or paralyse labour-power. On the contrary, if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream in this way, if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive, in an entire and completed pic-

ture, the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape, then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus there would be to induce man to undertake and complete extensive and strenuous work in the sphere of art, science and practical endeavour . . . The rift between dreams and reality causes no harm if only the person dreaming believes seriously in his dream, if he attentively observes life, compares his observations with his castles in the air, and if, generally speaking, he works conscientiously for the achievement of his fantasies. If there is some connection between dreams and life then all is well."

Of this kind of dreaming there is unfortunately too little in our movement.

LENIN: *What is to be Done?* Works, V, pp. 509-10.

. . . a man must have time for serious individual thought, for imagination – for dreaming even – or the race of men will inevitably worsen.

William MORRIS: *Art and Socialism*.

PART ONE  
GODS AND DEMONS





## CHAPTER ONE

### *Religion*

The attitude of a utopian writer towards religious problems cannot be disregarded by anyone seeking to define the ideological bases of his utopia. Utopia itself, in fact, involves the adoption of a position; it is necessarily a confident affirmation of the importance of the terrestrial world, even of its primacy. It does not accept resignation to the misery and injustice of the human condition; it tacitly rejects the consolation of a hereafter and it can, finally, either refuse to comment upon the existence of one or even deny it explicitly. Many utopias, however, are not without religious fervour and therein lies a fact not readily explicable in schematic fashion; in each case, it is a matter of temperament, of intellectual keenness, of period, of view of the world. For some, there is no contradiction; their mind is filled with the concept of unity between heaven and earth. With others it may simply be a matter of complete failure to see any contradiction. Some are conscious of it, but choose to be non-committal. But in all cases, whether the utopia is of an idealist inspiration or not, the author's personal beliefs cannot but influence the content of his dream, the form of his aspirations, his tendency to stress some certain aspect of the desired society, and the ethic of the mankind described.

The innumerable critics who have turned their attention towards the work of William Morris have never taken more than incidental note of his attitude to religion. The family biographers are extremely discreet. His daughter, May, whose own reactions are often confused and contradictory, is content, when she touches upon the problem, to insist upon her father's extreme reserve and his refusal to commit himself.<sup>1</sup> However, the very partial information she provides permits us, as we shall see, to determine certain traits. J. W. Mackail, for his part, is a far less certain source. Morris's socialism plainly embarrasses him, and the picture he draws sets out to be as respectable as possible. This is precisely why he dilates complacently upon the years of Morris's childhood and youth when he was responsive to the religious trends of the time, but he refrains, once this stage is past, to enlighten us upon the author's later reactions. Lacking adequate witness from his contemporaries, we will go to Morris himself. He, throughout his work, has expressed his thought in relatively clear terms. We must not expect forthright declarations. His attitude remains one of reserve, and is marked by his constant desire not to give offence; it is rare, nevertheless, for it to be ambiguous.

\* \* \*

Is it necessary for us to dwell upon his childish religion? I hesitate to think so. William Morris's utopian thought did not really begin to take shape before

the approach of the 'eighties. He was then over forty-five and had long given up any theological preoccupations. So it is not the real substance of what his religion had been which is truly interesting in our eyes. Rather it is the sum of activities and tastes which this temporary inclination of his intellect fostered, for it would be too much to say that they were created out of nothing. So, in this hasty examination, I shall follow J. W. Mackail's account, putting it together with the indications Morris himself provides, especially in his correspondence.

"The religion of the family," Mackail tells us, "was of the normal type of somewhat sterile Evangelicalism, which cursorily dismissed everything outside itself as Popery on the one hand or Dissent on the other. The children were not allowed to mix with dissenters with the single exception of the Quakers." <sup>2</sup>

This narrow outlook and this colourless background seem to have been common enough then among the middle classes. The word "enthusiasm", writes May Morris, was a pejorative term in religious circles, and social reformers such as F. D. Maurice were not looked upon as true Christians. <sup>3</sup> The openness of mind and the love of life in all its forms which Morris was not slow to show during his university years make it impossible to believe that this somewhat suffocating atmosphere could have exercised a lasting influence upon him. He is, moreover, categorical on this point and, in an autobiographical letter to Andreas Scheu many years later (5 September 1883), he declares that, even as a child, he was never easy with the conformist puritanism of the wealthy classes. <sup>4</sup>

However, religious practice had some effects. Around Walthamstow and Woodford, where the family lived, there were many old churches which they often visited, and the young Morris, already passionately responsive to the beauty of things and endowed with the rare gift of observation, knew their smallest decorative and architectural details very early. At times these visits were real journeys and so, at the age of eight, he, together with his father, discovered Canterbury Cathedral; it left, Mackail tells us, an indelible impression and was a revelation of all the splendour of Gothic art. <sup>5</sup> If we recall that he could read at four and was then devouring Walter Scott's *Waverley Novels*, we realise that a taste for the mediaeval past could not but develop precociously in him. Let us add that London had not yet invaded Essex, and that these visits and excursions introduced him to the charm of the English countryside with its beautiful old dwellings. But all this shows aesthetic pleasure and a taste for history much more than mysticism.

During the three years (1848-51) which Morris spent at Marlborough College, there appeared a new phenomenon, which, even if it did not yet assume great importance, laid the way for future developments. The school was a centre of Anglo-Catholicism and the observances practised there were firmly High Church in tendency. It happened that Morris's sister, Emma, also was caught up at that time in a wave of revivalism. Correspondence between the young people reflects these developments, but as far as Morris was concerned the only manifestation of the phenomenon lay in his taste for sacred music. We have a letter from him in which he speaks at length of a psalm which entranced him, but we notice that above all he details to his sister the

choral variations which the psalm admits.<sup>6</sup> One hesitates to see in this effusion anything more than an expression of aesthetic sensuousness; true religious emotion is missing. Nor is there any trace of mysticism in the letter which he wrote to Emma the month before (19 March), telling her of the order of the confirmation ceremony at the school. He confines himself to describing the bishop in commonplace terms and also, a very typical detail, the communion plate. Morris's tone seems to brighten up suddenly in a completely worldly postscript, in which he is eager to know whether his brother, James, has, as he had asked him, sold the baby rabbits he had reared, because he wants to buy a fishing rod with the money.

Mackail asserts that, at the end of his education at Marlborough, William was definitely Anglo-Catholic.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult, in the absence of more cogent personal witness, to assess the accuracy of this assertion, at any rate as far as the strength of his deeper feelings is concerned. It seems certain, in any case, that the High Church ritual must have attracted him infinitely more than the dull family puritanism, and been more in keeping both with his native love of beauty and with the fantasy of his imagination. Emma was probably more receptive to the new current. She was, moreover, to marry the next year a young clergyman strongly steeped in Anglo-Catholicism ("of pronounced High Church views"),<sup>8</sup> the Reverend Joseph Oldham, who had been curate at Walthamstow from 1845 to 1848. The young couple settled in a parish in Derbyshire, and in this way William was henceforth separated from his sister. Mackail tells us that he suffered greatly from this, adding that their intimacy had been very close and that it was under her influence that he had decided to enter the Church.<sup>9</sup> There are no grounds for completely rejecting this latter assertion, although we do not know upon what basis it rests; but we note that when, a few years later, Morris went back upon his decision, it was with his mother, not his sister, that he had to have the discussion, which leaves room to think that it was a matter of a premature family decision rather than of a vocation inspired by the sudden fervour of revivalism, as Mackail seems to imply.

The High Church influence did not immediately cease to operate upon him. When, in 1851, the deplorable administration of Marlborough College led his mother to withdraw him, he was, while waiting to go to university, entrusted to a tutor, "a High Churchman of the best type",<sup>10</sup> with whom Morris was to maintain very cordial relations.

In reality, whatever Mackail may say, it was only during his short university years that this influence was effective, and it was not to last. Morris's own evidence bears this out. He wrote, in fact, to Andreas Scheu, in the same autobiographical letter of 1883 already cited:

"I went to Oxford in 1853 as a member of Exeter College; I took very ill to the studies of the place; but fell to very vigorously on history and especially mediaeval history, all the more perhaps because at this time I fell under the influence of the High Church or Puseyite school; this latter phase however did not last me long, as it was corrected by the books of John Ruskin which were at the time a sort of revelation to me; I was also a good deal influenced by the works of Charles Kingsley, and got into my head therefrom some socio-political ideas which would have developed probably but for the attractions of art and poetry."<sup>11</sup>



It is pertinent to stress that the Tractarian Movement was then in its decline. Newman's conversion to Rome in 1845 had dealt it a mortal blow. By the time Morris arrived at university it was only a survival. Mackail himself admits that the great railway speculations of 1846 stirred public opinion more deeply than did the religious controversies and finished the process started by the conversion of Newman.<sup>12</sup> The atmosphere of Oxford had changed considerably, and Anglo-Catholicism was coming up against strong liberal and positivist positions. The arrival of the Great Western Railway opened the ancient city to modern life and began to change its mediaeval character. Oxford was no longer closed in upon itself, and the currents which Morris mentions in his letter to Andreas Scheu must have exercised an irresistible pressure on the spiritual ivory towers.

At a close look, this crisis which I hesitate to describe as mystical (let us call it rather, youthful fervour) began to calm down by the end of 1854. One may even wonder whether it would have lasted that long without the daily contact of Edward Burne-Jones, who entered Exeter College at the same time as William Morris and whose close friend he remained to the end of his days. Burne-Jones, also destined for the priesthood, was of a much more conformist temperament than Morris and always refrained from following his friend into the heterodox paths he was later to take: knighthood and official recognition were later to recompense this wisdom, which, it must be said, was in no way hypocritical. In 1853, in their college rooms, the two young men spent long nights devouring books of theology and ecclesiastical history. Mackail cites among them Neale's *History of the Eastern Church*, Milman's *Latin Christianity*, the *Acta Sanctorum* and numerous mediaeval chronicles. The reading of Kenelm Digby's *Mores Catholici* and the treatises of Archdeacon Wilberforce came near, in fact, to converting Morris to Catholicism.<sup>13</sup> As far as we know, no letter of Morris's dating from that period has survived, and we must rest content with what Mackail says, and he gives us no indication of the source of his information. The ardour of the two friends was tempered by more profane pursuits. Burne-Jones spent whole days drawing in the woods, so finding solace from his "theological perplexities".<sup>14</sup> As well as Carlyle, Kingsley and Ruskin, Tennyson stirred Morris's enthusiasm, and he, for his part, was pursuing his fervent exploration of the architecture and graphic arts of the Middle Ages. Quite a group ("the set") grew up around them, and it was not theology that was the centre of their interests. Canon Dixon, from whom Mackail sought and obtained evidence, leaves no doubt on the point:

"Jones and Morris were both meant for Holy Orders: and the same may be said of the rest of us, except Faulkner; but this could not be called the bond of alliance. The bond was poetry and indefinite artistic and literary aspiration."<sup>15</sup>

Dixon also tells us that, during 1854-55, readings of Shakespeare's plays took place in the rooms of "the set", and reveals the interesting fact that Morris declaimed with impressive conviction Claudio's speech in *Measure for Measure*: "Aye, but to die, and go we know not where."<sup>16</sup> The theme of this declamation, by no means in tune with orthodox Christianity, recurs several times in less and less romantic forms in the early works.

As early as 1853, Morris was writing poems. The greater part of them were

to be lost in a furious *auto-da-fe*. May's filial piety has preserved a few scattered fragments for us. Their inspiration is, certainly, religious but by no means mystical. It rather foreshadows, though overloaded with grandiloquence and saturated with mediaeval romanticism, the style of the great narrative poems of his maturity. May Morris quotes extensively from a poem entitled *The Dedication of the Temple*. Its subject is the Crusades, and its interest lies in its having been written in 1853, during the acute stage of Morris's Tractarian period. May appositely points out that one cannot find the slightest trace of fanaticism in the poem. On the contrary, she asserts, Morris condemns the violence of the Christians against the infidels and shows his compassion for the sufferings of the latter. "Pray, Christians," he exclaims, "for the sins of Christian men!"<sup>17</sup>

This crusading theme was in the air, together with an ideal of monastic life. On this point we lack Morris's own evidence and have only that of Burne-Jones, whose fervour was very exalted. In his letters to a friend in Birmingham, he several times mentions the idea of founding a monastery, and Mackail assures us that William thought seriously of devoting his fortune to an enterprise of this kind.<sup>18</sup> Burne-Jones invites his correspondent to join "this Crusade and Holy Warfare against the age"<sup>19</sup> – a formulation which leads us to think that, if the young painter was drawing Morris down the path of religion, the latter was perhaps making him share in the preoccupation he was deriving from contact with Carlyle and Ruskin. In the group too were young people from the Birmingham area, notably Cormell Price, who brought to Morris their knowledge of the Black Country and its social problems. And that is why, in 1855, the ideal of this "fraternity" bore an appearance which was much less monastic than social.<sup>20</sup> At the same moment, another factor intervened to exert a considerable influence upon Morris. This was his discovery of Chaucer, which was finally to give his mediaevalism a wide window on to the earthly world and to purge it of all spiritual excess, so producing in him a "secularization of mind", in J. W. Mackail's excellent phrase.<sup>21</sup> Religious observance certainly went on for a long time after this progressive abandonment of theological preoccupations; Burne-Jones and he often took part in the plain-song services at St. Thomas's Church but it was more and more a question of musical enjoyment to which for Morris was added the growing attraction of the plastic arts and architecture. Although the two young men remained joined by a friendship which was to stand against all vicissitudes, there was no longer the agreement between them on points of doctrine which had brought them together, as Cormell Price perceptively noted in May 1855: Burne-Jones had become too catholic to be ordained into the Anglican church and William was professing altogether dubious opinions.<sup>22</sup>

This problem of priestly vocation was soon to present itself with growing urgency to the two friends. As far as it concerned Burne-Jones, Cormell Price's perception was incomplete: he had not taken into account that another vocation, that of painting, had possessed him. It was in the summer of 1855, on the occasion of an unforgettable tour in France, wallowing in architecture and art, that one night, on the Le Havre quayside, the two young men resolutely faced the issue and decided to renounce the Church in order to devote their lives to art.<sup>23</sup> That Morris returned to Oxford in the autumn of 1855, was only out of regard for his mother, with whom he had, in September or October, a first,

somewhat stormy and indecisive discussion.<sup>24</sup> But, though he returned, it was not with the intention of pursuing his studies as far as his B.A., and, even before his return, he explained his reason to Cornell Price: he refused to sign the compulsory acceptance of the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England.<sup>25</sup> So the rupture was complete; it was not sentimental, it was doctrinal. Clearly it is a pity that we possess no letters from Morris between August and October to allow us to follow the stages of this rapid progress. We must rest content with stating its outcome, which is devoid of any ambiguity.

He now had to take up the matter with his mother and reach a final settlement. Feeling unsure of his ability to keep his temper, over which he had not been too successful at the time of the Walthamstow discussion, he chose to write to her, on 11 November.<sup>26</sup> It is a letter of moving tenderness which allows us to appreciate Morris's human qualities. But it does not tell us much about the motives of his decision. It is laboured, meticulously composed, aimed essentially at convincing his mother that, on the one hand, no material hardship would come of his new choice of profession and that, on the other, the calling of architect would allow him to be of use to his neighbour and to lead an exemplary life. One or two incidental reflections, however, merit our attention. First, one on the inadequacy of the instruction he received at Oxford: "... an University education," he wrote, "fits a man about as much for being a ship-captain as a Pastor of souls,"<sup>27</sup> — which is a roundabout way of conveying that only a sincere vocation, which he no longer possessed (if he ever had done), is needed to fulfil that office. A little further on, wishing to reassure his mother, who was disturbed about people's opinions of her son's lack of purpose, he promises to give the lie to such poor opinions, "God being my helper", by the persistence of his efforts.<sup>28</sup> This abrupt reference to God does not carry conviction. This whole letter is deliberately phrased in a moralising style (very different from the tone of his correspondence with his friends) which suggests with involuntary cruelty the heavy and dreary family atmosphere. Morris is seeking arguments and words to pacify poor Mama; he must keep to her level of understanding and leave her, perhaps, some illusions. One thing is certain — henceforth and for long years, until the moment when his transformed, mature thought once again confronts religious problems, all personal reference to God disappears from his vocabulary.

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He never again took part in any religious observance. His only visits to churches were entirely in response to artistic impulses or through enthusiasm for the campaign he later undertook for the protection of ancient monuments. The only exception to this rule was the baptism of his daughters, Jane Alice (Jenny) in 1861 and Mary (May) in 1862;<sup>29</sup> perhaps he did not wish to shock his family. After Emma's marriage to an Anglo-Catholic parson, the affection Morris showed her became tinged with irony. One would like to know what it was he gave her for Christmas in 1870 which was calculated, he wrote, to operate in the opposite direction from what she had known in her youth.<sup>30</sup> In 1883, announcing to Jenny Aunt Emma's arrival in London, he tells her that the object of her journey is "holy larks",<sup>31</sup> in which he will certainly not join. His attitude towards his friends and relations is the same. Being in



Marlborough for a few days in 1876, he refused to accompany his hosts to service on Sunday, and recounted the incident to his wife in the same ironical tone.<sup>32</sup> This detail is not without interest. If Jane Morris seems in fact to have shown little sympathy for her husband's socialist ideas and friends, she does not appear to have made the smallest difficulty over the question of religious observance. Many disbelievers have found themselves in awkward situations because of their disbelief and felt obliged to make some concessions. The freedom which Morris enjoyed in this respect within his family leads us to believe in his complete sincerity. He was not, after all, a man to allow himself to be put upon, and his horror of any hypocrisy shows throughout his work. The faint-hearted acceptance of a practice in which he no longer believed was repugnant to him, and in a book which he was to publish in 1893 in collaboration with Ernest Belfort Bax under the title of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, we find these biting lines:

"... most intelligent persons will allow that it (the religion of modern society) means nothing more than mere sets of names and formulas, to one or other of which every reputable man is supposed to be attached; in one or other of which he will be sure to find a conventional solution of the great problem of the universe, including our life and its aspirations. If he fails in his duty to society in this respect he suffers accordingly; and indeed few men of any position are bold enough to avow that they are outside all such systems of ecclesiasticism; the very unorthodox must belong to some acknowledged party – they must be orthodox in their unorthodoxy. But as a fact the greater part of cultivated men dare not go as far as that, and are contented with letting society in general feel happy in believing that they subscribe to the general grimace of religion that has taken the place of real belief..."<sup>33</sup>

Morris's attitude stems, then, not from a personal whim, but from a position of principle. He has lost his faith, and refuses to make any "grimace".

\* \* \*

With his Christian faith lost, what belief remained to him? In other words, what was the limit of his disbelief? May Morris maintains firmly that her father became and *remained* an agnostic. Trying to describe his state of mind on the approach of 1870, she launches into rather lyrical and at times somewhat verbose flights, from which we may extract the following:

"... the future stretches before him with its grave question; ... how best to answer to the high sense of duty towards humanity and the beyond: in 1860 he would call it God, later in life the mystery beyond our visible world had no name."<sup>34</sup>

This chronology seems to me to call for some reserve. Nothing in Morris's work seems to me to justify so late a date as 1860. As for "later in life", I think that in this sphere as in many others, the first years of the 'eighties mark an important turning point in his thought. After having read *Capital* and flung himself headlong into the struggle for a better society, it was inevitable that he should modify and clarify his thought.

May's assessment, nevertheless, retains its validity in so far as this long intermediate period is concerned, lasting over twenty-five years entirely devoted to artistic and poetic creativity, and during which his thought rarely reached the level of general concepts. No evidence of his contemporaries, none of his letters, afford us the slightest illumination: matters of religion seem to be banished from the field of his consciousness. It is only in his many long poems that we can occasionally glean a few meagre hints.

We meet this deliberate rejection of all metaphysical preoccupation from the first lines of *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70):

*"Of Heaven and Hell I have no power to sing,  
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,  
Or make quick-coming death a little thing . . ."* <sup>35</sup>

And in the 'Envoi' which closes this long sequence of poems, he proclaims his ignorance of the meaning of life and death:

*"Death have we hated, knowing not what it meant;  
Life have we loved, through green leaf and through sere,  
Though still the less we knew of its intent . . ."* <sup>36</sup>

Again we find this declaration of ignorance, in a somewhat confused passage of *Love is Enough* (1872) upon which May Morris dwells at rather greater length to buttress her theory. She writes significantly:

"For him the mysteries that lie beyond the life of man are wrapt in impenetrable silence. The moments of inspiration that must come to all in some degree may bring broken visions of a new life, dim sounds of a new language, but no knowledge of whence they came may be vouchsafed:

*How shall the bark that girds the winter tree  
Babble about the sap that sleeps beneath?"* <sup>37</sup>

If May Morris had gone to the trouble, she could doubtless have found more significant passages; for example, the sonnet which serves as preface to *The Story of Grettir the Strong* (1869), from which I extract these two lines:

*"As toward the end men fare without an aim  
Unto the dull grey dark from whence they came."* <sup>38</sup>

The years during which these poems were written belong to the most painful period of Morris's life. His domestic happiness was threatened, and, up to the moment when the journey to Iceland came to restore vigour and confidence, it was in vain that he steeled himself within a stoical, uncomplaining reserve: life seemed pointless and meaningless. Is it too much to wonder whether his refusal to penetrate the mysteries of before-birth and after-death were not, after all, a kind of discouraged indifference? Certainly, if the tendency to pessimism was of short duration, traces of this agnosticism are found up to 1881. This was the year of Carlyle's death, and he wrote to his wife on 10 February "... So Carlyle is off to learn the great secret at last ..." <sup>39</sup> However, the "dull grey dark" referred to in the poem just quoted was, not long afterwards, given by Morris another, much more precise name. Reread these few lines of *The Earthly Paradise*:



*"... While many a band of striving men  
Were driven betwixt woe and mirth  
Swiftly across the weary earth,  
From nothing unto dark nothing."* <sup>40</sup>

Can we think, even in an isolated instance, that Morris could use this word if his conception of the world were not already steeped in materialist thought? The writings of his maturity, in any case, leave no doubt about his refusal to believe in any survival, and certain passages of *The House of the Wolfings* (1888) express this refusal with equal clarity. Wood-sun begs Thiodolf not to rush to death:

*"A few bones white in their war-gear that have no help or thought  
Shall be Thiodolf the Mighty, so nigh, so dear – and nought . . .  
Nay thou shalt be dead, O warrior, thou shalt not see the Hall  
Nor the children of thy people 'twixt the dais and the wall.  
And I, I shall be living; still on thee shall waste my thought.  
I shall long and lack thy longing; I shall pine for what is nought."* <sup>41</sup>

\* \* \*

From the period of *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris's attitude is clearly critical and even rationalist. Could one describe otherwise the words he puts into the mouth of one of his story-tellers:

*"It made me shudder in the times gone by,  
When I believed in many a mystery  
I thought divine, that now I think forsooth,  
Men's own fears made, to fill the place of truth  
Within their foolish hearts . . ."* <sup>42</sup>

But let us come finally to the beginning of the 'eighties. One man was scandalising England: Charles Bradlaugh, avowed atheist, founder of the periodical *The Freethinker*, member of Parliament, which denied him the right to take his seat because he refused to take an oath on the Bible and claimed the right to make a solemn non-religious affirmation, triumphantly returned time after time by his constituency of Northampton. Morris does not appear to have had any direct contact with him, but, in the beginning at least (we shall see later how things went otherwise for political reasons), he felt a most lively sympathy for him and warmly commended the stand he made. In a letter of 1883, he tells Jenny of the enthusiasm with which he has read his speech in the House of Commons.<sup>43</sup> Free-thinking, anti-clericalism, secularism and even atheism held nothing to shock him.

What is striking about Morris's attitude of mind during his years of socialist propaganda is the effort he made to adapt his language to his new convictions and his irritated reactions when formulations of religious origin, although consecrated by usage, came, despite himself, from his pen. We find two characteristic examples in his correspondence, which is always so spontaneous. In June 1884, in a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones, intended to convert her to revolutionary ideas, he wrote, by way of conclusion or excuse:

*"I shall offend you desperately some day I fear, meantime to think me quarrelsome is a misjudgement, for I commonly hold my tongue when my conscience (I don't like that ecclesiastical word) bids speak: so when*

at last I *do* speak it sounds quarrelsome you know.”<sup>44</sup>

The other example is yet more curious, in view of the sort of man to whom Morris was writing. It comes from the first of the four celebrated letters written to the Rev. George Bainton in 1888:

“Since man has certain material *necessities* as an animal, Society is founded on man’s attempts to satisfy those necessities, and Socialism, or social consciousness, points out to him the way of doing so which will interfere least with the development of his special human capacities, and the satisfaction of what, for lack of better words, I will call his spiritual and mental necessities.”<sup>45</sup>

These peculiarities of style reveal a rational inner compulsion, ever alert and a growing secularisation in Morris’s thought. His political rigidity, whose limitations, late in the day, he came to recognise, can be ascribed to the same preoccupation, and it is this rigidity which led him to write in 1890, in an article in *Commonweal*, lines of uncommon boldness which display a conviction that undoubtedly goes beyond simple agnostic prudence. In this article he opens a discussion with Christian socialists, but, while paying tribute to their sincerity, and welcoming their support, he demands that such an alliance must be unambiguous; scientific socialism cannot have a religious doctrine as its basis, and any confusion on that point must be swept away:

“... if Christianity is a revelation ‘*addressed to all times*’ it can *not* be neutral as to political and social institutions, which, if they are to be binding on men’s consciences, and not pieces of arbitrary coercion, must be founded on a system of morality; and that morality must not be founded on explanations of natural facts or a theory of life in which people have ceased to believe. At the risk of offending “real Christians”, however well-meaning or honest they may be, we must ask “Is this TRUE?”<sup>46</sup>

The capitals are Morris’s own. So posed, the question suggests the answer, and lets us understand clearly that Morris’s utopia can only be one of materialist inspiration.

Certainly William Morris always hated to lay himself open. On the key question of the existence of God, it is plain that he avoided the issue whenever possible. The very name of God is only found at widely spaced intervals in the twenty-six volumes of his works. So it is of evident interest to examine the rare occasions when he does tackle the problem. And it is as well to set aside the replies which he was ready to make to correspondents who questioned him on the point. Then his first concern was to avoid ruffling feelings and to bring his questioner back to the issue which, in his eyes, took precedence over all others: the struggle for the transformation of society. However, even in these careful or evasive replies we can find food for thought. In fact, only two letters of this kind are available to us, both dated 1884, which is not at all surprising: it was, in fact, the period when he was striving to rally his friends to the Social Democratic Federation and to overcome their doubts, and one can well believe that the latter might have arisen from religious scruples. The letters to which he was replying have not been preserved, but it is plain that they must have been similar in tenor:

On 20 June 1884, he wrote to Robert Thompson:

"I must decline to argue theological points: I don't understand them: if there be a God, he, or it, is a very different thing from what religionists imagine."<sup>47</sup>

A curious reply from a man who previously, at Exeter College, had plunged with Burne-Jones into theological treatises. A reply expressing rejection of what now seems to him to be an unreal problem.<sup>48</sup> But it is a reply which also suggests a broadening of outlook. Undoubtedly he categorically sets aside the Judeo-Christian conception of God. But we see him addressing himself to another conception, the heterodoxy of which appealed to him and which was linked in his mind with an important aspect of his interest in the Middle Ages. This "he, or it" seems to recall certain pantheistic tendencies among mediaeval heretics (such as Thomas Münzer and Jacob Boehme) which, through the long anabaptist tradition, mark a whole underground current of English religious thought and which well up unequivocally in *A Dream of John Ball*. We might refer to the sermon on the steps of the cross:

"Therefore, I bid you not dwell in hell but in heaven, or while ye must, upon earth, which is a part of heaven, and forsooth no foul part."<sup>49</sup>

And this mediaeval heresy seems to Morris worthy of consideration. On condition, as he says, that God exists. But let us make no mistake; his interest is above all historical. It gives body to his vision of an organic, earthly Middle Ages, the values of which are transposed on to a higher plane in his utopian perspective. His attitude towards old beliefs remains totally detached and singularly secular:

"Mediaeval history in all its detail," he writes, "with all its enthusiasms, legends, and superstitions, is now cultivated by many who have no ecclesiastical bias, as a portion of the great progress of the life of man on the earth."<sup>50</sup>

His constant tendency was to insist upon the absence, in the religion of earlier days, of any metaphysical preoccupation: that is a foreign body introduced by "the strange mysticism and dreamy beauty of the East";<sup>51</sup> it is a heritage which has been assimilated, transformed, fused into the natural unfolding of the glory of Gothic. Mysticism was an exceptional phenomenon: religion and daily life interpenetrated without clash or contradiction.<sup>52</sup> Such is the vision he has restored in *A Dream of John Ball*, and, even more, in the late romances where all belief is resolved into an ever more pagan naturalism.

It is this very primacy of earthly humanism which finds its expression in the second letter to which I referred. It is inspired by the same propagandist purpose, and is addressed to William Allingham and dated 26 November. Less bold and less rich in underlying implication than the former one, it is nevertheless significant:

"*Imprimis*, I don't touch on matters theological, which I never could understand, except to say that a God who stood in the way of man making himself comfortable on the earth would be no God for me, nor doubtless for you."<sup>53</sup>



This rejection of all asceticism and this concern for man's happiness constantly inspire his utopian quest.<sup>54</sup> Certainly there is no formulation here as clear as in the previous letter. Nevertheless, let us note that he wrote "would not be a God for me", and not "is not", which is very different.

In fact, his prudence and reserve were always dictated by political reasons which I shall shortly analyse, and a real burst of temper was needed to make him overstep them. He had a violent temperament, and the discipline which he constantly imposed upon himself, in order to serve the cause he was defending, was worthy of admiration. It was only on a single occasion that a somewhat revealing word escaped him. May Morris relates an incident told to her by Sydney Gimson, Morris's host when he was in Leicester. On 23 January 1884,<sup>55</sup> after he had delivered his lecture on *Art and Socialism* for the Secular Society of that town, he came up against the Rev. J. Page Hopps, in a lively after-dinner discussion. The latter, reverting to the socialist perspectives expounded by Morris in his lecture, declared: "That's an impossible dream of yours, Mr Morris, such a Society would need God Almighty himself to manage it." The poet stood up, advanced upon the unfortunate cleric waving his fist and said: "Well, damn it man, you catch your God Almighty – we'll have him!"<sup>56</sup>

I feel that this possessive needs no comment.

But we do not have the least need of this outburst to know what Morris thought. When, six years later, he published his *News from Nowhere* in *Commonweal*, he had recourse to no supernatural intervention to describe the functioning of his socialist society. Not only do we meet no clergy and see no religion practised in his England of the twenty-second century, but the new humanity he describes at no moment shows any religious interest: it has even totally forgotten that such interests could exist. Not one of the people in his tale makes the slightest reference or once utters the name of God. Only old Hammond, the Sage of Bloomsbury, who has discreetly pierced the Visitor's identity in the course of a long conversation he has with him in the British Museum, and who tries to put himself on his level in order to make him understand the realities of the new world, only he makes use of such a reference. In order to explain to him that, in the new society, work no longer needs payment and that its recompense lies in the very joy of creation, he adds: "The wages which God gets, as people might have said time ago."<sup>57</sup>

However, Morris later had occasion to express himself in less allusive manner and in terms which do not give room for the least ambiguity. In *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, he sketches with Bax a brief outline of the genesis of the religious idea, from which I take the following paragraph:

"... with the development of material civilisation from the domination of things by persons to that of persons by things, and the falling asunder of society into two classes, a possessing and dominating class, and a non-possessing and dominated one, there arose a condition of life which gave leisure for observation and reflection to the former, that is, the privileged class. Out of this reflection arose the distinction of man as a conscious being apart from the rest of nature. From this again was developed a dual conception of things: on the one hand was man, familiar and known; on the other nature, mysterious and relatively unknown. In

nature itself there grew up a further distinction between its visible objects, now regarded as unconscious things, and a supposed motive power or "providence" acting on them from behind. This was conceived of as man-like in character, but above mankind in knowledge and power, and no longer indwelling in natural objects, but without them, moving and controlling them." <sup>58</sup>

This is not at all the place to discuss the scientific value of this argument, which Morris and Bax hang rather clumsily on to Marx's historical materialism. Let us observe that, even if the composition of this passage appears due to Bax rather than to Morris, the latter had no scruples over subscribing to this undisguised declaration of atheism.

He came to be even more explicit. Does he not speak, in an article in *Commonweal* of 18 May 1889, of an "imagined ruler" of the universe? <sup>59</sup> In another article, appearing the next year, he stigmatises the

"worn-out superstition, which sees in the struggling world of men . . . little more than an appendage and plaything of an irresponsible master, who neither asks nor allows mankind to understand him or his arbitrary commands." <sup>60</sup>

In his lecture on *Equality* (of which May Morris only published fragments, characteristically omitting the passage we quote here) Morris goes much further and denounces the imposture of the divine right of bosses:

"an idea founded on the assumption that there exists an arbitrary irresponsible God of the universe, the proprietor of all things and persons, to be worshipped and not questioned; a being whose irresponsible authority is reflected in the world of men by certain other irresponsible governors whose authority is delegated to them by that supreme slave-holder and heavenly employer of labour". <sup>61</sup>

Let us add that the romances contain more than one detail that is hardly veiled in meaning, <sup>62</sup> and Morris's atheism was no mystery to his friends. W. Scawen Blunt wrote: "... he does not believe in any God the Creator of the World, or any Providence, or, I think, in any future life". <sup>63</sup> Despite all his efforts to clothe Morris's message in spirituality, Bruce Glasier himself recounts this saying of his: "I am what is called bluntly an Atheist. I cannot see any real evidence of the existence of God or immortality in the facts of the world". <sup>64</sup> And that must have been hard for Glasier, who was then, like his wife, a prey to all the exaltation of Theosophy. <sup>65</sup>

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Morris's position is, as one might expect, firmly negative over a belief in a soul and its survival. In this same chapter of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, in which Bax and Morris briefly study the formation of the religious idea and thereby reject all revelation, we read, immediately following the paragraph already quoted, these lines:

"Another set of dual conceptions arose along with this: firstly, the distinction between the individual and society, and secondly, within the individual, the distinction between the soul and the body." <sup>66</sup>

And further on:

"An importance began to be attached to the idea of such future life for the individual soul, which had nothing in common with the old existence of a scarcely broken continuity of life, founded not on any positive doctrine, but on the impossibility of an existing being conceiving of its non-existence."<sup>67</sup>

It is interesting to see that Morris associates the distinction between soul and body with the distinction between the individual and society, implicitly condemning both. All his utopia, in fact, tends to restore the unity of mankind, which has been disrupted by the antagonism of social classes and which can only be restored by the revolutionary abolition of capitalism, the cause of all antagonisms and divisions. Both distinctions will be found to disappear when universal unity is recovered.

If I expressed doubts about the paternity of the previous fragment, I am, on the other hand, certain that the last fragment quoted is by Morris himself. We find there, in fact, the ideas and formulations of an essential passage in *A Dream of John Ball*, which is much more explicit and significant. It is in Chapter IX, entitled *Between the Living and the Dead*, describing the watch kept by the poet and the priest in St. Martin's Chapel over the bodies of those killed in the recent battle. The interest of this episode lies in the opposition between the two men over problems of the soul and survival. Of course, John Ball is a heretical priest. He goes so far as to call in question the wisdom of a God who could endow some men with the souls of swine and wolves, and even wonders whether such men have a soul; and his faith in the unity of heaven and earth goes far beyond the limits of orthodoxy. Nevertheless, he is sincerely and deeply a believer. The poet hesitates to shock him, and there we see Morris's constant scruple, but he ends up by saying that he cannot answer such a question because he has never seen a soul other than in the body.

Nevertheless, retorts the priest, what would be the purpose of life if men could not look forward to the reward of "the heavenly fellowship" after death? To which Morris makes the remarkable reply, remarkable less for its materialism than for its rejection of all finality: "They live to live because the world liveth."

They then approach the bodies of their dead and John Ball asks him whether he feels sorrow at the sight, either for the dead friend or for the prospect of his own death. No, replies Morris, the body is but an empty house, and, as for as his own death, how could he think about it. While he is alive, he cannot think that he will die or believe in death at all – he can only think of himself as living in some new way. The priest, intrigued by this way of putting it, takes him to be making a reference to survival in the hereafter. But the poet disillusioned him, shaking his head, and John Ball realises that there is a wall between them. Morris explains the depths of his thought: "... though I die and end, yet mankind yet liveth, therefore I end not, since I am a man."<sup>68</sup>

Morris rarely explained his position with such precision, and never defined better the materialist basis upon which, in his utopian vision, will rest his "religion of mankind".

A quick digression is necessary here. May Morris, in fact, quotes words said to have been uttered by her father on his death bed. Anecdotes of this kind are always *a priori* somewhat suspect, but this one seems to shed light as much



upon the naïvety of the one who recorded it, and of May herself, as upon the continuity of Morris's thought. May goes to the diary of the Rev. Stopford Brooke, who records having received a long letter from Holman Hunt, who told him that Mary de Morgan, the devoted and redoubtable friend of the Morris family, heard the poet murmur during his last illness: "I can't but think that somehow or other we shall live again."<sup>69</sup>

The last words of the dying rarely carry much conviction; even less so when they vary from one version to another. According to Cobden-Sanderson, he said: "I cannot believe that I shall be annihilated."<sup>70</sup> The difference is not all that important, anyway. Some will plead the poet's lowered physical condition, which is not, perhaps, irrelevant. Others will read a spiritualist meaning into the words, or, following in the footsteps of the Rev. Stopford Brooke, who saw in Morris "a strange creature – not of this world of ours",<sup>71</sup> or in those of May herself, who saw in the words an abrupt and possibly unique glimpse of her father's ideas about the "Unknown".<sup>72</sup> But it does not appear to me that there is any contradiction between this phrase and the very lucid thought expressed by Morris in *A Dream of John Ball*: life goes on without any need of recourse to a hereafter. Moreover he expresses this thought even more clearly and concisely in other writings. Did he not say that the condition for life to be worth living is that "we can live fearlessly and confident of our immortality not as individuals but as a part of the great corporation of humanity"?<sup>73</sup> The only possibility of survival for the individual lies in the glory of outstanding acts and the memory they leave behind. He saw in this idea one of the bases of the Nordic religions during the barbarian ages and this idea recurs in a great number of his poems.<sup>74</sup> But he refuses to go any further.

"Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing", he had written already in *The Earthly Paradise* – itself a significant title. The idea of a heavenly paradise seemed ridiculous to him and he could not see himself "sitting on a damp cloud and singing hymns".<sup>75</sup> As for the idea of eternal damnation, it provoked his indignation, and his dearest wish was that man's labour should cease to resemble "the hell imagined by the theologians".<sup>76</sup> It is, he said, "as much violence to threaten a man with evil in the future as to shake a whip at him now."<sup>77</sup> Belief in survival came to jar upon him to such an extent that, according to Bernard Shaw, he conceived a real hatred for Wordsworth and his *Intimations of Immortality*, a hatred which extended to any pious poetry which might, even from a distance, remind him of the evangelism of his childhood.<sup>78</sup>

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William Morris does not appear to have been free, before the 'eighties, of some degree of anti-clericalism. The Rev. Stopford Brooke himself related to May Morris that he made his acquaintance at a dinner in 1867. "He didn't care for parsons, and he glared at me when I said something about good manners."<sup>79</sup> Even during the devout period of his youth, he does not seem to have shown special respect for the clergy; telling Cormell Price of a visit to an Essex church in 1855, he stresses the incredible filthiness of the parish priest.<sup>80</sup> Later, in his diary of his Icelandic travels, he slyly refers to "the long-nosed cadaverous parson" who was his guide in the Faroe Islands.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, this anti-clericalism only assumes a definite and purposeful form

during the years 1877–79. It was in 1877 that Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, dubbed “Anti-Scrape”, whose objective was to combat all attempts at “restoration” in the Victorian manner of mediaeval architecture. It was his first secular crusade and his ardour for this cause remained firmly militant to the end of his life. It exerted a definite influence upon the development of his thought, because for the first time it brought him into collision with what he bitterly refers to many a time as “the rights of property”. But it brought him up against another obstacle, the hostility of the clergy who proposed to settle the fate of their churches themselves. Morris railed at the “ecclesiastical zeal” which set about restoration without any care for art,<sup>82</sup> and against the stupidity and negligence which would spend thousands of pounds on decorating a church while allowing the rain to ruin its roof.<sup>83</sup> He despaired of plumbing the depths of clerical ignorance, even more crass, he wrote, than that of architects, and he appealed through the medium of the press (notably *The Athenaeum*, 1877) to public opinion, in order to convince it that ancient buildings are not “mere ecclesiastical toys”.<sup>84</sup> He wrote to *The Times*, three months later, that these monuments are the property of the nation and must not remain at the mercy of the many changing ideas of what constitutes “ecclesiastical propriety”.<sup>85</sup> In 1878, when the City churches built by Wren were threatened with demolition, he wrote again to *The Times*, appealing to the English “by strong and earnest protest (to) show the ecclesiastical authorities that they will not tamely submit to this outrageous and monstrous barbarity”.<sup>86</sup>

By this time Morris had already acquired a prodigious knowledge of the history of art, and he undertook another, no less lasting, crusade with the aim of restoring the decorative arts, “the lesser arts”, to their rightful place. He had not yet reached the point of thinking that only the advent of socialism would permit their flowering, but he analysed the past and present obstacles hindering the development of these “popular” arts, an analysis which strengthened his hostility towards the churches. Thinking of the soaring of these arts in the Middle Ages, he observed how harmful luxury and superstition had been to them, the extent to which religion had been able to elevate them in use and the extent to which it had degraded them through detestable uses.<sup>87</sup>

With the passing of the years, his optimistic, earthly conception of art became more and more radically opposed to religious asceticism: the latter regards art as a “wordly entanglement which prevents men from keeping their minds fixed on the chances of their individual happiness or misery in the next world;” the devout “hate art because they think that it adds to man’s earthly happiness”.<sup>88</sup> The enemy to be overthrown is religious manicheism which sees nothing but evil in the world, and this dominant ideology will endure until “history has become a book from which the pictures have been torn.”<sup>89</sup> What Morris finds particularly shocking in ascetic Christianity’s belief in the hereafter is the calculation, the egoism, implied by such a religion. As his socialism grew stronger, he linked in his contempt two kinds of adversary who differ in appearance only; on the one hand, those who disregard the future of mankind and think only of enjoying ephemeral pleasures without regard for other people, and, on the other hand, those whose only purpose is to “secure a good position each for himself in a future life”. He regards these two outlooks



as "pretty much the same, since each means despair of our life upon the earth".<sup>90</sup> He cannot accept a "religion which looks upon another world as the true sphere of action for mankind".<sup>91</sup>

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This declared hostility towards religion and the clergy, however, became less extreme; in his later years it developed discretion, or more accurately, lost what can be called its "vulgarity".

There were two reasons for this change of attitude. The one lay in the needs of the political struggle. The other is to be sought in the increasing influence upon him of Marxism. The absorption of historical materialism led him to look upon the fact of religion, not as a fundamental and autonomous reality any longer, but as a superstructure, a reflection in men's consciousness of the material conditions of their existence and of their production relationships.<sup>92</sup> Morris came little by little to see in religion a historical phenomenon intimately linked with the class struggle, with successive transformations corresponding to transformations in society.

He had early noted the interpenetration, the interdependence and the common development of superstructures. "It is not possible" he was saying in 1879, "to dissociate art from morality, politics and religion", and it is pure formalism to study them separately.<sup>93</sup>

But these arguments still came from a somewhat idealistic inspiration. It was only in 1885 that the spirit of scientific socialism really began to impregnate Morris's thought. It is in the Notes, jointly signed by Morris and Bax, accompanying the October edition of the Manifesto of the Socialist League, that we find for the first time formulations on the religious question which indicate a new turn of thought. In Note E, there is reference to the new morality which will of necessity be engendered by "a new system of industrial production". Now, morality rests only upon the responsibility of the individual towards a supernatural being, but "the attributes of this being are but the reflex of some passing phase of man's existence and change more or less with that phase".<sup>94</sup>

Again and again we find this refusal to look at religion in the abstract and from the angle of eternity. On 6 May 1888 he writes in the last of his important letters to the Rev. George Bainton:

"When I use the word Christianity I do not mean some abstract idea, any more than a set of dogmatic assertions, but an historical phase through which the world of civilization has passed, or, if you will, is passing."

He adds that every religion leaves traditional after-effects, even when it has ceased to play a rôle, and here he joins Marx, who observed in a celebrated remark that consciousness lags behind being. But, writes Morris, there cannot be anything whatsoever everlasting in the specific details of the Christian religion, any more than in those of older religions, although, as he recognises, the principles it professes are probably of a more elevated nature. Religion means the habit of feeling oneself responsible to something outside oneself, but

this "something" does not always impose that responsibility in the same terms.<sup>95</sup>

He is even more precise when, on 8 March 1890, in an article in *Commonweal*, he embarks upon a discussion with a Christian socialist named Rickarby.<sup>96</sup> The letter had drawn a distinction between "real" Christianity and "actual" Christianity as practised. Morris rejects any distinction of the kind:

"Mr Rickarby's contrast between real and actual Christianity evades the point of difference; that real (I should call it ideal) Christianity has never existed at all. Christianity has developed in due historical sequence from the first, and has taken the various forms which social, political, economic circumstances have forced on it; its last form moulded by the sordid commercialism of modern capitalism being the bundle of hypocrisies which, as I have said, Mr Rickarby with other Christian Socialists condemns".<sup>97</sup>

Morris repeatedly brought historical considerations to bear upon the transformation of Christianity at the time when feudalism was giving way to capitalism. In 1885, he remarked that the feudal class, for whom religion was nothing more than a "grimace", used it in its rearguard action against the merchant class. Consequently the latter, when it freed commerce from the fetters imposed by the former dominant class, at the same time "freed thought from her fetters of theology, at least partially".<sup>98</sup>

A few years later, in 1889, in his lecture on Gothic architecture, he returned to the phenomena that characterised the Renaissance. His account has remarkable depth and accuracy, and one is constantly reminded of *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848. It is the change that has come about in production relationships which has determined the change in superstructure: a new political life marked by the birth of bureaucratic power and the coming of the idea of nationhood. To consecrate the commercial age a religion was needed, itself new, fitted to the new theory of life.<sup>99</sup> This was Protestantism.

But, as he observes in 1893 in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, Protestantism only developed in the Germanic countries. The Latin countries remained Catholic. Does this mean that Catholicism remained what it had been in the Middle Ages? Not at all. It is a mistake, say Morris and Bax, to set the two religions in opposition: they represent two aspects of the same phenomenon. Catholicism repudiated the mediaeval condemnation of usury, adapting itself to the age of commerce, and, like Protestantism, became an instrument of the bureaucracy. It too is, in fact, a new religion, which the authors describe by the name of "Jesuitised Catholicism".<sup>100</sup> Again and again Morris insisted upon the fundamental identity of the two religions, of their nature and material objectives. They are two parallel superstructures. Bourgeois tyranny

"in Catholic countries took the form of pure materialistic cynicism masquerading in priests' garments; and in Protestant of a religion made for the rich which proclaimed competition for a good position in this world and the next as the real rule of conduct".<sup>101</sup>

He stresses the radical difference between the mediaeval religion and what is still called Catholicism:

"Real Catholicism died with the Middle Ages: modern Catholicism is but a survival from it, kept alive on the one hand by its alliance with absolutist bureaucracy and on the other by its alliance with Puritanism, with which, though Catholicism is less revolting on the surface, it has much in common".<sup>102</sup>

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From this historical analysis there emerged one point which was soon to assume fundamental importance in Morris's eyes: religion is and has been in all epochs the guardian of the established order, identifying its interests with those of the dominant class, and is an instrument of oppression and exploitation. Far from idealising the Middle Ages, as has sometimes been claimed, Morris did not hesitate to say that mediaeval piety had no other aim than to maintain among "the wretched slaves of this world" the hope of becoming "the joyous masters of the next".<sup>103</sup> But it is quite certain that the conduct of the Church appears in a much more revealing light with the coming of capitalism, and it was the study of modern society that revealed it completely to Morris. He first became aware of it when jolting the enfeebling conformism that made the Victorian atmosphere oppressive: a general cowardliness engendered by holy respect for "the rights of property, the necessities of morality, the interests of religion".<sup>104</sup>

He was not slow to realise that religion contributes to the consolidation of the régime through a dialectical process. On the one hand it is a result and a reflection of the sufferings of workers obliged to struggle for a livelihood. On the other, its doctrines of renunciation and resignation, born of their despair, "have been for so many ages used as instruments for the continuance of that oppression and degradation".<sup>105</sup> There is a close, constant, essential bond between religious ideology and economic servitude,<sup>106</sup> unceasingly maintained by "the revival of grovelling superstitions".<sup>107</sup>

Morris stigmatised the sanctification of poverty, hunger and ignorance. He regarded with contempt the promise made to the poor of a paradise where they will relax while the wealthy go to hell. Such an ideology effectively complements the work of the police and the deprivation of the right to education.<sup>108</sup> Old Hammond, in *News from Nowhere*, describing to his visitor social conditions in England before the "great change", speaks of a "class system which proclaimed inequality and poverty as the law of God".<sup>109</sup>

The middle classes no more escape than do the people from this obscurantism which is intended to keep them, too, in their place. The petty bourgeoisie of traders and artisans, while not hungry, is content to live in mediocrity and ugliness "crushed by grovelling superstitions".<sup>110</sup> Nor do educated circles resist this dominance any better, and therein lay a major obstacle to socialist propaganda. If the group set up by Andreas Scheu in Edinburgh in 1884 did not succeed in winning the students, it was religious factors, Morris wrote to him, that above all held them back.<sup>111</sup>

Religion and the clergy make up an integral part of the bourgeois state machine just as do the armed forces, the police and the law,<sup>112</sup> and they all make common cause to defend "the rights of property". The modern capitalist has taken the place of the highway robber: instead of sword and pistol, he has



at his disposal these material and spiritual resources, and, moreover, morality and religion provide him with a mask.<sup>113</sup> When popular discontent threatens the privileges of the bourgeoisie, it is in the names of morality and of religion that repression operates. In the comedy *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened*, which Morris put on at a Socialist League festival in 1887, he staged a grotesque prosecution of a poor woman who had stolen a loaf from a bakery, and put into the mouth of the prosecutor weighty words which express the holy alliance of religion and bourgeois society for their common defence.<sup>115</sup> If the possessing class fears popular discontent, it is just as much afraid of social reformers, and its classic tactic is to discredit them in the name of religion. In this way it endeavoured to isolate Owen and Lammenais.<sup>115</sup> Curiously enough, however, it seems that Morris retained illusions about the Catholic Church for some time, and perhaps we should see in that fact the last survival of the tractarian enthusiasms of his Oxford years. But the critical capacity acquired in the course of his life as a militant socialist rid him of such illusions. In December 1887 a great discussion took place in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, with him present; its purpose was to find remedies for the widespread misery of London's unemployed. Morris paid special attention to the contribution made by Cardinal Manning, and in giving an account of it in *Commonweal*, he began by stating his awareness of the lack of hatred towards the poor which he noticed in the prelate's tone, contrasting, he observed, with that usually met in cultured circles, even when disguised by the cloak of philanthropy. But as he continued speaking, Morris realised that one should not seek in his words anything more than another totally demagogic kind of philanthropy. In short, he concluded, no help is to be expected from the Catholic Church, only a charitable attitude less wounding in form, and the expression of a few commonplace truths which might on occasion upset bourgeois digestions.<sup>116</sup> Catholicism also is a pillar of the established order.

What provoked Morris's indignation, when this collusion between churches and capital became plain to him, was the hypocrisy or cynicism with which the bourgeoisie, while using religion to assure its ascendancy, blithely ignores its precepts and commandments when it finds them inconvenient. They then invent particular rulings allowing them to be avoided.<sup>117</sup> In fact, they have not always been able to foresee the consequences of this religious morality whose spread they have encouraged, but they never hesitate for one moment to throw it overboard whenever it clashes with their own interests.<sup>118</sup> The bourgeoisie's practical conception of it is in persistent opposition to the theory it preaches.<sup>119</sup> A particularly revolting instance of this came to Morris's notice during a journey in Scotland in 1887: he discovered that Presbyterian and sabbatarian forge-owners were making their employees work a seven-day week "in this Devil's Den". These bosses would doubtless have given expression to their horror if they had seen their workers indulging in sports on the Lord's day.<sup>120</sup> Morris certainly had in mind the contemptuous denunciation made by Karl Marx of the employers who profaned the sabbath.<sup>121</sup> But religion is in the service of the powers of money, and must bend to their will. As to the personal convictions of these capitalist magnates, history itself renders them suspect. Have they not built up their wealth through prodigious industrial development and a growing mastery over nature? And would this mastery have been possible without the development of the sciences, themselves born of the rejection of

the old superstitions? So these men founded their exploitation upon technical and scientific power, anti-religious in its origins, and make use of religion to maintain and extend this exploitation.<sup>122</sup> But they do not consider such problems, and their faith, when it exists, is a comfortable faith: "they very naturally therefore are always fairly contented with the world as it is, especially since most of them look forward to another Bourgeois world beyond".<sup>123</sup> It happens that they salve their consciences by the exercise of charity or philanthropy. Recourse to evangelical morality then encourages them to consider the distinction between rich and poor as "a providential fact, at which neither the poor nor the rich have the right to repine".<sup>124</sup>

On the whole, their outlook is much more cynical, and their hypocrisy knows no bounds when it is a question of opening up new colonial outlets. A good pretext is "the pushing of a religion no longer believed in by its promoters".<sup>125</sup> The newspapers assert that "this task of civilising Africa is well worthy of Modern Christianity; . . . twenty per cent and the Gospel . . . are tempting, indeed. To save your soul and your business at one stroke is certainly making the best of two worlds".<sup>126</sup> For the colonial peoples, "one day it is rum-and-bible, another sword-and-bible".<sup>127</sup> They are sent soldiers like Gordon "that most dangerous tool of capitalistic oppression, the 'God-fearing soldier' ".<sup>128</sup> It is strange, writes Morris, "that the new Attila, the new Ghengis Khan, the modern scourge of God, should be destined to stalk through the world in the gentlemanly broadcloth of a Quaker manufacturer".<sup>129</sup>

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In Morris's eyes, once he had become a theoretician and a socialist militant, religion is thus an obstacle to all progress, a danger of which he is fully conscious and of which he reminds his comrades when they are inclined to lose sight of it. At the annual supper of the *Kelmscott Fellowship*, in March 1932, Harry Lowerison recalled a conversation he had had with Morris, Bernard Shaw and Belfort Bax after a lecture in Hammersmith: "Shaw, Belfort Bax and I were chatting after a lecture in the old shed in the Mall. The churches just then were a little more intolerant and reactionary than usual, and I got angry and was damning them in good set terms, when I was surprised to hear Bax, of all men, say: 'You're flogging a very dead horse, Lowerison.' Morris had come up behind me, and he met Bax on the rebound with: 'Dead! the church! you mind its hoofs, Bax, and its teeth; neither end is safe' ".<sup>130</sup>

Nevertheless, with remarkable insight and political sense, Morris refused to let himself be drawn into declarations and attitudes inspired by "vulgar anticlericalism". Undoubtedly the clerical danger existed and he did not hesitate to denounce it whenever he thought necessary. But the main enemy was the capitalist system. When he attacked religion, it was only in so far as it put itself at the service of the ruling class. But militant atheism and anticlerical feeling must never take the lead over the political and social struggle. That was, in effect, exposing oneself to a double risk. On the one hand, honest and aware workers, still attached to a belief, would hesitate to join the ranks of the Socialist League and we know that Morris went to a great deal of trouble to avoid public meetings going off down this perilous path.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand,



it would be committing a grave error of judgment to turn the activity of militants aside from what should remain the essential objective of their struggle. "At least it may be said that there is time enough for us to deal with this problem and that it need not engross the best energies of mankind, when there is so much to do elsewhere".<sup>132</sup> We may note in passing that Morris's position is identical with that adopted by Marx at the General Council and in the Congress of the International Working Men's Association.<sup>133</sup> There is everything to gain, thought Morris, by refusing to concentrate the attack upon religion, because the only result of such an attitude would be to give it a new lease of life.<sup>134</sup> It is even striking to observe that this understanding of political necessity matured within him very early. In 1884, when he was still a member of the Council of the Social Democratic Federation, he opposed Aveling's proposal aimed at writing into the programme of the Federation a demand for the separation of Church and State,<sup>135</sup> which, at that time, could only have shocked opinion and turned attention away from genuine social demands.

Another fact, from that same year on, which must have strengthened his conviction and put him on guard against the pitfalls of anticlericalism, was the violent campaign against socialism launched by Bradlaugh and carried on to the end of his life, in which he did not hesitate to spread the most personal and, at times, the silliest, slanders against Marx and his circle.<sup>136</sup> At the beginning of 1884, in the Hall of Science in the Mile End Road, he gave a series of anti-socialist lectures, at which Shaw and Andreas Scheu represented the opposition. A public debate was arranged, and took place on 17 April in St. James's Hall, between Bradlaugh and Hyndman, with Professor Beesly, the eminent positivist, in the chair. Hyndman had some difficulty in defending the socialist viewpoint against the furious assault of Bradlaugh's magnificent oratory.<sup>137</sup> Morris, who does not appear to have spoken during these verbal joustings, was solidly in support of Hyndman and for evermore felt a keen antipathy towards Bradlaugh.<sup>138</sup> So he discovered that the most outrageous views of freethought were perfectly reconcilable with the most reactionary political ideology, the most hostile to social progress. This provided one more reason for deliberately excluding metaphysical controversy from the propaganda of the Socialist League. It could only introduce confusion and ridiculous divisions among the contenders. The only possible criterion rested upon the way to look at production relationships and the attitude towards property. Bradlaugh and his friends justified capitalist appropriation: therefore they were to be branded, together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duke of Westminster and the greedy grocer who adulterates his wares.<sup>139</sup>

Morris's position, dictated by thought and not by feeling, was, then, prudent, restrained, free from any sectarianism.<sup>140</sup> One may well be astonished at the large number of clerics with whom he established and maintained continuous links. I quote at random (probably overlooking some) such names of clergymen as Glasse, Bainton, Dixon, Stopford Brooke, Sharman, Marson. Certain of them were won over to the ideas of socialism, and the Rev. C. L. Marson even contributed to *Commonweal* articles whose religious orthodoxy was highly questionable.<sup>141</sup> In his long letters to the Rev. George Bainton, Morris strives to show that nothing in socialist morality can affront a Christian: socialists brand the present rulers of society as thieves, but does not Christianity denounce dishonesty just as strongly as does socialism?<sup>142</sup>

When he comes to the delicate problem of lay education, a problem which, even if it was less sharp than in France, nevertheless engaged the British conscience during the years we are considering,<sup>143</sup> Morris avoids any extreme attitude. Certainly, there are standpoints of principle which were set out in the Manifesto of the Socialist League; in future socialist society, education was to be freed from the trammels of commercialism on the one hand and superstition on the other.<sup>144</sup> But he thinks that by that time the economic liberation of society will have transformed family life and that there will not be "any necessity for using compulsion towards rational education".<sup>145</sup>

So there was a complete absence of sectarianism together with the broadest tolerance. When he writes to *The Times*, in 1878, to arouse opinion against the plan to demolish Wren churches in the City, is he not defending religious rights, just as much as historical and artistic rights, against financial interests?<sup>146</sup> And for the sake of the same considerations, in 1887 he launched an appeal for the preservation of the old church at Inglesham.<sup>147</sup>

All these declarations on Morris's part are, then, contradictory in appearance only. He has reached personal conviction solid enough for metaphysical speculation to seem quite pointless: it irritates and bores him. He lives wholly and passionately inside earthly reality, and, with exemplary selflessness, he devotes all his efforts to preparing for the coming of a new society, which his utopian vision makes real and almost tangible to him. All his propaganda is directed towards getting men to share his vision and enthusiasm. But the fact of religion exists. He only wishes it were as unimportant to others as it is to him.<sup>148</sup> Unfortunately it is nothing of the kind, and Morris would, at any rate, like each individual's belief to remain something personal and intimate, as his own disbelief is to him. And that is not so either. Other people's convictions seem worthy of respect to him, but the churches are temporal powers in the service of temporal interests, and their influence sets up serious obstacles in humanity's road to happiness. He appreciates the hopelessness of frontal attack and refuses to confuse cause with effect. He is far from any temptation to try to "écraser l'infame"; that would be to make permanent division among those he wishes to unite. So in this sphere he carries on a purposely restricted fight, carefully subordinated to the pursuit of essential objectives, and only takes a stand against religion in so far as the latter is aggressive in the political or social field.

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This reserve finds a complementary (possibly a fundamental) justification in his confidence in mankind and the future of the human race. When, all the conditions having been fulfilled, the socialist revolution comes about, men will find so much satisfaction in their existence, they will have so little need for heavenly consolation or resignation to their lot that the foundations of religious ideology will crumble of their own accord. Economic liberation will deliver men from their fantasies, and that is the very reason why it would be absurd to bring the least pressure to bear.<sup>149</sup> But it is still imprudent to trumpet this certainty abroad, for fear of being imperfectly understood and wounding sensibilities: it is, even, only a probability, for Morris never tries to impose his utopian vision as dogma.<sup>150</sup> Perhaps the human race, even then,



will continue to speculate upon the problem of its own existence, but it will be under totally different conditions, in a calm and propitious spirit, because, instead of: "Why were we born to be so miserable?" the question will be: "Why were we born to be so happy?"<sup>151</sup> Theological morality will then be nothing more than a survival,<sup>152</sup> and we have already seen that, in Morris's utopian vision, expressed in *News from Nowhere*, it has totally disappeared. Old Hammon is categorical about this: "... assured belief in heaven and hell ... has gone".<sup>153</sup> Socialism will have transformed men's lives and habits to the point where all these controversies, over which we become so heated today, will be "forgotten, useless, and lifeless like wrecks stranded on the seashore".<sup>154</sup> Henceforth, reason will triumph. No supra-terrestrial consideration, no submission to an imaginary master of the universe, will any longer play a part in relationships between men. Their ethic will be founded upon "the recognition of natural cause and effect", and it is this materialism, as much as the abolition of inequality, which will be the life-blood of existence in communist society.<sup>155</sup>

Does this amount to saying that this new humanity will selfishly enjoy its liberty and its dearly bought material happiness, will know no satisfaction other than that of its daily needs, and will have no moral cares or aspirations? By no means. A new conscience will have arisen from the joys of the new life, and a new, materialist religion, possessing no cult, no priests and no metaphysics, will then flourish. It is this "religion of mankind" that I shall examine in the last part of my work, when I analyse the rich and varied aspects of the utopia of William Morris.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Bourgeois Consciousness*

Georges Duveau, in his *Sociologie de l'Utopie*,<sup>1</sup> incidentally remarks that there are, with very rare exceptions, no workers' utopias. In fact, if we restrict ourselves to the study of English literature, we are obliged to admit that, from Sir Thomas More to the most recent writers, utopias have always been a bourgeois phenomenon. How are we to explain this fact?

One first consideration is immediately obvious: the industrial proletariat has existed as a really distinct class only since the last years of the eighteenth century, and one has to wait a great deal longer to see the emergence of an authentic working-class literature. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the level of education was too low to allow the sorely exploited workers to rise to any speculations beyond organisational and political ones. Utopia implies a high level of culture: one builds the future, not only by submitting contemporary society to judgment, but even more perhaps by reflecting upon history.

The present – a wretched, narrow present – bore down with all its crushing weight upon the working-class consciousness. Despite the unprecedented surge of industrialism, the level of the productive forces was still insufficient to allow the Newcastle miner or the Manchester spinner to conceive the abundance needed for blossoming into utopia: the poverty of periodic crises was a more compelling dread. Poverty was so great that it engendered a total inability to conceive of a better lot, and that was an obstacle encountered by William Morris throughout his career of militancy. Religion sustained this resignation and channelled all utopian aspirations towards the hope of supernatural compensation after death.

As the working class, to an ever greater degree, shook off this resignation and apathy and rose to a consciousness of class and then of the trade union and political struggle, the weight of the present in no way decreased, and dreams of the future were pushed aside by the need of fighting step by step for immediate, tangible improvements. No doubt, a certain utopianism was mingled with the fervour of these demands, but it was not of proletarian origin, and one can even say that it was not long in losing its intransigence and becoming diluted and degraded into everyday material objectives. While the wealthy industrialist Robert Owen drew the parallelograms of his perfect society founded upon co-operative *production*, the workers who had been beguiled by his message set up the first *consumers'* co-operatives, incurring the wrath and disavowal of the prophet. Owenism, even in its bastardised form, was soon to appear a dead end, or suffer further transformation when the standard of Chartism was raised.

The working class did not have the time to build ideal cities; the horror and pestilence of the slums of Manchester and the East End had to be mitigated first. It was necessary to live today and especially to stop dying of hunger. It was necessary to win the right to bread, to clothing that was more than rags, to decent working-hours, to education, and also to the vote, which would make it possible to assure the legal acquisition of these advantages. In difficult and dangerous circumstances, the best militants, all self-educated, carried on a day-to-day struggle which absorbed all their energy and often exhausted all their strength. How could these men, even those least involved in the struggle, have had available that imagination, have known that sweetness of dreaming, which are the essential attributes of every utopist? Their life was one long sacrifice, closely bound up with that of their union or their organisation, and in them there was scarcely any of that individualism (an essentially bourgeois characteristic) necessary for the elaboration of a utopia if it is true, as Morris recognised, that every utopia is "the expression of the temperament of its author".<sup>2</sup> I may note in passing that this perhaps explains why there has never been a utopia produced by collaboration.

In the twentieth century, the position has become appreciably different. The social and political gains of the working-class in the capitalist countries have raised it to a level of relative well-being and education which enable it to dream of the future, even if the needs of the day-to-day struggle are just as demanding as before. But it does not dream of it, it thinks about it. On the one hand, scientific socialism has habituated its most enlightened vanguard to a rigorous theory, a consciousness of the laws of history, which do not at all encourage wandering off into subjective fantasy. On the other hand, the arrival of socialist states or states building socialism has posed the problem of perspectives to the working class in quite different terms. It deals with real experiences, often following them passionately, despite the complexity of their economic implications. It interprets the socialist future, not in the language of utopia, but in that of planning.<sup>3</sup>

In the history of utopia, the 'eighties constitute an intermediate period which was, if one considers it, unique and almost strange. It was the moment when Marxism, a fertilisation of the workers' movement by the scientific thought of two intellectuals originating from the bourgeoisie, was spreading in England. The works of Marx and Engels available to the British public were not numerous; their study by the masses was still cursory and without consequence. Its first expounders were intellectuals: Belfort Bax, Hyndman, Aveling, William Morris; and the latter is the only one among them to have assimilated certain elements of dialectical thought. No doubt, the essence of historical materialism was understood by them and absorbed into their outlook. Nevertheless, though they discovered (with such enthusiasm!) the scientific theory of history, and clearly conceived the idea of a classless society, they were strangers to Marx's careful rigour and his avoidance of subjective prophecy. Filled with ardour and passion, they were haunted by the problems of "the morrow of the Revolution" (a phrase which constantly recurs in their writings) more than by any realistic appreciation of the needs of the struggle. These men of the middle classes wanted to make their contribution to the theory of the workers' movement, but their lack of contact with the proletarian masses condemned them to involuntary isolation in sects, and William Morris



the poet thought for a long time that the only way to attract the masses lay, not in the search for palliatives to lessen their poverty, but in the presentation of a radiant prospect. At this time, apart from the too-brief episode of the Paris Commune, no socialist experiences had yet happened to impose upon these hopes the pitiless discipline of real situations.

So we are considering a unique moment, which passed forever, when only a bourgeois intellectual, saturated in a Marxism whose strictness he did not always appreciate, and led by his enthusiasm as much as by his very origins into uncompromising formalism, could want to change the world by offering the oppressed classes a vivid picture of their liberation, drawn direct from the analyses of scientific socialism. It would be quite impossible to understand the special characteristics of William Morris's utopia without taking into account the social factors that contributed to the formation of his personality.

\* \* \*

In his autobiographical letter of 5 September 1883 to Andreas Scheu, William Morris wrote significantly:

“My Father was a business man in the city, and well-to-do; and we lived in the ordinary bourgeois style of comfort . . . My Father died in 1847 a few months before I went to Marlborough; but as he had engaged in a fortunate mining speculation before his death, we were left very well off, rich in fact.”<sup>4</sup>

Mackail gives us fuller details of this “speculation”, and the term is certainly too strong, because the writer's father owed his fortune to pure chance. A company was formed in 1844 to exploit veins of copper discovered near Tavistock, in Devon. It was launched with a modest capital of 1,024 one-pound shares. Mr Morris senior held 272 of them and they appear to have come into his possession as repayment of a debt. As soon as work started, it became clear that the deposits were extremely rich. Copper was then worth £160 a ton, and the undertaking, which gained rapid notoriety under the name of *Devon Great Consols*, was able to produce large amounts of ore at low cost: 750,000 tons a year, Mackail tells us, and the value of Mr Morris's holding rose for a time to more than £200,000.<sup>5</sup> E. P. Thompson comments acidly, but justly enough, that these handsome dividends flowed regularly into the Walthamstow household without bearing any trace of the sufferings endured by the miners at the bottom of the narrow and ill-ventilated shafts.<sup>6</sup> When William reached his majority, he had an annual income of £900,<sup>7</sup> a considerable sum in the middle of the nineteenth century, bearing in mind not only the level of prices but taxes less democratically based than in our days. These resources, however, decreased noticeably around 1864 with the rapid exhaustion of the deposits. It was a difficult moment for the young artist, who had to leave his lovely new home, Red House, to live in London where he worked hard at the young decorating business in Red Lion Square. This, thanks to ecclesiastical orders,<sup>8</sup> had already become a paying concern. Soon the “Morris Firm”, of which William finally became sole owner, was a success and it became a very prosperous business. By the end of his life he had considerable resources and used to spend prodigious sums buying mediaeval manuscripts.<sup>9</sup>

Was he a good businessman? Mackail's biography,<sup>10</sup> and the memoirs of George Wardle, who managed the Firm for some years,<sup>11</sup> leave us with mixed impressions on the point, of both efficiency and slackness. His aim, Mackail tells us, was not to make money but to make the objects he manufactured. This judgement seems fair and completely consistent with all we know of Morris, of his creative enthusiasm, his devotion to his aesthetic ideal,<sup>12</sup> and his complete honesty. But, to realise this ideal, the undertaking had to be solvent and so it was, despite a number of careless practices. One of the most serious was to have working together, notably in the Merton Abbey workshops, piece-rate workers and those paid by the hour, and also the continued employment, through generosity, of unduly old or incompetent employees. Another specially interesting detail is that Morris was never deterred by expense, and never bargained over the purchase of materials of the highest cost and quality. Such prodigality did him no disservice – quite the contrary, because this excellence was appreciated and ensured him a plentiful and wealthy clientèle. It is difficult to say whether commercial shrewdness was part of his outlook, running alongside his aesthetic ideal. In fact, it rather seems that his success was the outcome of psychological qualities rather than commercial acumen. He was an admirable trainer of men. His infectious faith and his consuming activity enabled him to get an exceptional return from the hundred or so artisans and employees working under his orders and by his side. And, perhaps above all, he had an extraordinary flair for surrounding himself with really able executives: first, George Wardle, then the Smith brothers and later, at the Kelmscott Press, Sydney Cockerell. Mackail quite shrewdly observes that the choice of a good administrator argues sound administrative qualities. The fact remains that, despite certain blunders, Morris tackled his business with tireless enthusiasm and obtained indisputable material success.<sup>13</sup>

This will to succeed came, no doubt, in the first place from a high sense of his artistic mission, and he would never accept any compromise. On this level of ideas, he had a delightful way of showing rich but uncomprehending customers to the door.<sup>14</sup> But that by no means indicates that he treated money with contempt. Because, first, by his own admission, he had no sense of economy,<sup>15</sup> and also because riches were a necessity to him, the essential condition for freedom in his work. When, in 1873, he was beset by financial difficulties, he became obsessed with the fear of poverty and made up his mind to hammer away at making "the Firm" a success.<sup>16</sup>

The freedom to work as he liked, and as determined by his successive misisions, was certainly the predominant reason for his desire to remain wealthy. I feel strongly obliged to add that it was not his only reason. Despite very simple personal habits, it would have been difficult for him to give up the bourgeois ease he had always known, and he derived enormous pleasure from the splendid décor of his Hammersmith house,<sup>17</sup> as well as from the rural charm of Kelmscott Manor. His marriage only strengthened this tendency. Jane Burden, the daughter of an Oxford groom, seems to have accustomed herself very easily to a more ample life. The impressive fall of her dresses was a subject of admiration; the meals she provided for guests at Kelmscott House were, on Shaw's authority, "works of art almost as much as the furniture";<sup>18</sup> her supposedly frail health, her frequent indefinable illnesses, (she died in 1914, surviving her husband by eighteen years), were the occasion of her long

journeys in Germany and Italy. We may add that the very real illness of Jenny, Morris's elder daughter, deeply affected him and caused him considerable expense.

The way of life in a large house seemed to Morris to be the most natural thing in the world. It is interesting to examine his 1878 letters to his wife (then in Italy) when he decided to take a lease on Kelmscott House, which was still called "The Retreat". Jane, told of its situation, complained because the district was so far from the centre of London. William replied that he found this objection not unreasonable, and even sympathised with it. But, he pleads,

"I don't think we shall manage to get what we want nearer; you see this is practically what we want in a house: servants' rooms, kitchen and the rest: then 1st 2 nice airy rooms (though they needn't be very big) for our dear maidens: 2nd a good and quiet room for you, my dear: 3rd either a biggish room for my study to hold a bed for me also, or some den for my head, & a fairish room for my study: nor 5th can we quite do without a spare room: 6th 2 sitting rooms and (especially if only 2) one of them to be decidedly a good room: this, I think, is the least we can do with . . . At the risk of being considered self-seeking, I must say that in the ordinary modern-Cromwell-Road-sort-of-house I should be so hipped that I should be no good to anybody; nor do I think that either you or the girls would get on in such a place . . .

. . . P.S. Mind a poney & chaise at The Retreat."<sup>19</sup>

On 2 April, William informed Jane that the deal was concluded. He pointed out that, despite its distance, the house would attract visitors by its garden and its view of the Thames. "The maidens," he added, "could have the 2 queer little rooms above for larking rooms," and there would be room enough to house a third maid.<sup>20</sup>

A third maid? That was in 1878. That was not to be the end of the story. *Isis*, the Oxford University magazine, in its number 1500 in November 1965, published a special edition devoted to the Victorian era, and in its summary figured an interview given to its editor by a very old lady named Floss Gunner who, in 1891, at the age of fourteen, entered the Morris family's service as a kitchen maid. Her evidence gives us something to think about. We learn, in fact, that in addition to her the domestic staff comprised a cook, a young male servant, a chambermaid, a parlour maid and another maid whose functions combined something of both of these.<sup>21</sup> No doubt not to have a servant in the last century would have been, for a bourgeois family, to have come down in the world,<sup>22</sup> but to have half a dozen certainly gave class to a house. William Morris probably had no dealings with all these staff<sup>23</sup> and did not know how much work was required of them. If one is to believe Floss Gunner, it was a good deal, but, even if one supposes him to have been aware of this, his own capacity for work was such that it would scarcely have shocked him. Was he also ignorant of the fact that, to start with, the kitchen maid earned six pounds a year, and nine at the end only?

Such a style of household, it should be stressed, was not unusual at the time. It was a long way from approaching the extravagant luxury of wealthy households. It was simply typical of the well-off bourgeoisie.

Having come from easy circumstances and never having ceased to belong to



this background, even if romanticism and art had dispersed the chilly fogs of his childhood and brought joy in living and flights of imagination, William Morris remained faithful in his way of life to bourgeois habits, and his natural simplicity was itself attuned to the traditional attitudes of the British middle classes. At no moment in his development, even when his uncompromising political attitude brought him into vehement opposition with his own class, did he dream of denying his social origin. "We of the middle classes" is an expression one finds constantly in his lectures and his articles. He felt himself to be bourgeois and did not hide the fact. One is impressed by the loyalty he showed to his class during the full fervour of Pre-Raphaelitism, at an age and in a bohemian atmosphere when everything might encourage rejection, even more than by expressions like that quoted, which were consciously employed during his socialist years. "I am bourgeois you know," he wrote to Madox Brown, "and therefore without the point of honour."<sup>24</sup> His biographer insists, perhaps with disingenuous exaggeration (we know how little enthusiasm Mackail had for Morris's socialism) on his being "a typical Londoner of the middle class", and upon his more and more marked resemblance to Samuel Johnson.<sup>25</sup> He took pleasure in describing his bourgeois virtues of hard work, honesty, reserve, in contrast with the uproarious prodigality of Rossetti;<sup>26</sup> and Morris himself does not give the lie to this picture in his correspondence. In 1884, telling Andreas Scheu of the difficulties he was having over getting in money owed to the weekly *Justice*, he exclaimed: "Perhaps 'tis my bourgeois blood, but this un-straightness on money matters discourages me very much."<sup>27</sup> One may wonder, too, whether this "bourgeois blood" was altogether free from a trace of snobbery. The question might come up when we attempt to examine the relationship between Morris and his wife's family. We do not know much about Elizabeth, Jane's sister, except that she helped the latter with embroidery for the Firm<sup>28</sup> and lived with the Morrisises at Queen Square. William could not stand her and felt he had nothing in common with her,<sup>29</sup> so he was glad when she stopped living with them.<sup>30</sup> There is nothing in this that is not perfectly natural: he wrote that he had nothing against her and considered her to be "harmless and even good" but liking does not come to order. One thing is more strange, and that is that Robert Burden, Jane's father, a groom in Holywell Street, Oxford, disappeared immediately and completely from the life of the couple, and it is quite impossible to find the slightest reference to him. May Morris, for her part, although she makes a very passing reference to her Aunt Bessy,<sup>31</sup> never has a word to say about her maternal grandfather. The lack of information reduces us to conjecture, but does not exclude disagreeable questions. For example, one is intrigued to read a letter of February 1885 in which Morris relates to Mrs. Burne-Jones that he has recently given a lecture in Oxford in Holywell Street, "just opposite where Jancy used to live".<sup>32</sup> We do not know whether Robert Burden still lived there; in any case, Morris does not appear to have crossed the road. And, above all, what happened between Jane and her father? What we do now know without doubt is that she put pressure on Mackail not to mention Robert Burden's occupation in the biography, and refused him permission to reproduce a drawing by Burne-Jones of the house where she was born.<sup>33</sup>



These facts, which throw some light on some aspects of his life, also give us a measure of the enormous length of the road travelled by the writer, the depth of his thought, the force of his generous sensibility, and the courage he showed in espousing the cause of revolutionary socialism.

This development, which took place between 1877 and 1883, has been followed through in masterly fashion by E. P. Thompson, and there would be no point here in repeating the account. It claims our attention in so far as it explains his pathway towards utopia.

During this pre-socialist period, William Morris's bourgeois conscience was not yet aware of any real contradictions. It was as a bourgeois democrat that, in 1877, he issued his emphatic manifesto against an "unjust war",<sup>34</sup> and it is interesting to consider the spirit in which this was composed. The writer was still a member of the Liberal Party, and his intention was deliberately political. It was the Conservative majority, its leader Disraeli and the foreign policy of the Government that he was primarily attacking. If he railed against certain social strata, they were those who provided the basic support for the Tory Party, "greedy gamblers on the Stock Exchange, idle officers of the army and navy (poor fellows!), worn-out mockers of the Clubs . . .";<sup>35</sup> and it is evident when, a few lines on, he wrote: "us of the Middle Classes", the distinction in his mind is clearly and definitely between these circles and the bourgeoisie of which he proclaims his membership.

But the originality of this document is that it is addressed to the working class, having as its sub-title: "To the Working Men of England". Morris had still not the slightest acquaintance with this working class, but he had been deeply impressed by his first contacts with union leaders and with the radical clubs on the occasion that was to develop into his activity in the Eastern Question Association; they already inspired a confused feeling that they constituted a growing, decisive force that compelled respect. So he was filled with indignation at the contempt for the working masses expressed in the circles he was condemning; and it was as a bourgeois, ashamed of the attitude of the topmost layers of the ruling class, that he sought to put the working men of England on their guard:

"Working men of England, one word of warning yet: I doubt if you know the bitterness of hatred against freedom and progress that lies at the hearts of a certain part of the richer classes in this country: their newspapers veil it in a kind of decent language; but do but hear them talking among themselves, as I have often, and I know not whether scorn or anger would prevail in you at their folly and insolence: – these men cannot speak of your order, of its aims, of its leaders without a sneer or an insult: these men, if they had the power (may England perish rather) would thwart your just aspirations, would silence you, would deliver you bound hand and foot for ever to irresponsible capital."

I will not linger over the naivety and illusions still reflected in that last phrase; let us confine ourselves to noting the violence of the resentment Morris expresses towards that section of the bourgeoisie which he is repudiating. A lasting resentment, for twelve years later old Hammond in *News from Nowhere*,

relating to his guest the sequence of events which were to culminate in the triumph of the revolution, described the rôle of the reactionaries, "men who in ordinary times were forced to keep their opinions to themselves or their immediate circle".<sup>36</sup> But, in 1877, Morris refused to believe that such hypocrisy and ill-will were characteristic of the bourgeoisie as a whole. He addressed himself to the working class because he felt that it alone could play a decisive part in the movement of opposition to the "unjust war", but he begged it to "... urge us of the Middle Classes to do no less, so that we may all protest solemnly and perseveringly against our being dragged and who knows for why? into an UNJUST WAR".<sup>37</sup>

For a long time, these working masses were to remain an abstraction for him. If, for some years, he had ceased to feel, as in his youth, "too happy to think that there could be much amiss anywhere",<sup>38</sup> yet he could still, in 1882, declare to his listeners:

"I had rather say a few words to finish with to those of my own class, to the rich and well-to-do, and the rather because, and it is a woeful confession to have to make, I know little of any class save my own."<sup>40</sup>

It is in terms of this ignorance and limited outlook, I feel, that we must understand, without being upset, the declarations he trumpeted forth in his early lectures on art in favour of a return to craftsmanship which would restore artistic merit to everyday objects, particularly in pottery and glass-making, accepting as normal and necessary the inevitable rise in prices that such a return would involve.<sup>41</sup>

His first approaches in the direction of the working class were full of sympathy and goodwill, but they bore, to an almost embarrassing degree, the marks of bourgeois paternalism. Each must have his due, he declared:

"For those of us that are employers of labour, how can we bear to give any man less money that he can decently live on, less leisure than his education and self-respect demand?"

The bourgeoisie, he considered, had yet other duties, in particular that of setting an example by the simplicity of its way of life. In a preaching tone, which seems to derive from his evangelical childhood, he claimed that such an example would effectively lessen the horrible contrast between the wastefulness of the wealthy and the needs of the poor, and so provide "an example and standard of dignified life to those classes which you desire to raise, who ... are given both to envy and to imitate the idleness and waste that the possession of much money produces."<sup>42</sup>

This puritan paternalism was not to last long. Morris realised very rapidly that the "elevation" of the working class as a class would result from its own determination, but he hoped that it would be assisted by the goodwill of the bourgeoisie:

"... it seems to me that both to the working-class and especially to ourselves it is important that it should have our abundant goodwill, and also what help we may be able otherwise to give it, by our determination to deal fairly with workmen, even when that justice may seem to involve our own loss".<sup>43</sup>

This confidence in his own class was slow to diminish. Much more, during this pre-socialist period, when he was already haunted by utopian preoccupations and the vision of happy days to come,<sup>44</sup> he believed in the revolutionary mission of the bourgeoisie. That class, in the name of its past, was duty bound to remedy the injustices and make good the artistic damage which its own society had brought about in order to build a higher society. I think it appropriate to quote *in extenso* a fragment of this same lecture, given in 1881. The lyricism and beauty of image bear witness to William Morris's conviction:

"I may say without fear of contradiction that we of the English middle classes are the most powerful body of men that the world has yet seen, and that anything we have set our heart upon we will have: and yet when we come to look the matter in the face, we cannot fail to see that even for us with all our strength it will be a hard matter to bring about the birth of that new art: for between us and that which is to be, if art is not to perish utterly, there is something alive and devouring; something as it were a river of fire that will put all that tries to swim across to a hard proof indeed, and scare from the plunge every soul that is not made fearless by desire of truth and insight of the happy days to come beyond.

That fire is the hurry of life bred by the gradual perfection of competitive commerce which we, the English middle classes, when we had won our political liberty, set ourselves to further with an energy, an eagerness, a single-heartedness that has no parallel in history; we would suffer none to bar the way to us, we called on none to help us, we thought of that one thing and forgot all else, and so attained our desire, and fashioned a terrible thing indeed from the very hearts of the strongest of mankind.

Indeed I don't suppose that the feeble discontent with our own creation that I have noted before can deal with such a force as this – not yet – not till it swells to very strong discontent: nevertheless as we were blind to its destructive power, and have not even yet learned all about that, so we may well be blind to what it has of constructive force in it, and that one day may give us a chance to deal with it again and turn it towards accomplishing our new and worthier desire: in that day at least, when we have at last learned what we want, let us work no less strenuously and fearlessly, I will not say to quench it, but to force it to burn itself out, as we once did to quicken and sustain it."<sup>45</sup>

A passage of crucial importance in more than one respect, despite the confusion of its expression, and it marks a critical point in the life of William Morris. The negation of commercial civilisation already finds expression in it, and there is already an aspiration towards a happier world as well. But the social and economic content of such a revolution is not yet perceived, because of his lack of a scientific understanding of society and its production relationships. The only point at issue is still aesthetic humanism. The ways and means are still to be discussed and the essence of the problem is still distorted by the writer's class illusions, by the fundamental illusion that a revolution which would bring into question and destroy the bourgeois way of life could be the work of the bourgeoisie itself.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, this passage, despite its inconsequences, has an objective merit which is to be appreciated. If he does



mistakenly associate the bourgeoisie with the building of a future, which is not at all its function, he is fully right in doing justice to its past revolutionary and progressive rôle. Nowhere in Morris's work is this consciousness so clear, and, unfortunately, it no longer appears after his conversion to socialism. His leftist formalism and his mediaevalism lead him, even more than Ruskin, to reject *en bloc* the historical contribution of the bourgeois class to human progress, to strike out of history and exclude from utopia four centuries of civilisation. On this point, Morris's thought departs from Marx's. But this excess of anti-bourgeois reaction itself could only come from a bourgeois, disappointed in his trust and in his illusions.

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In 1883 William Morris crossed the "river of fire" beside which he had been anxiously pondering and gathering his strength for two years. He achieved for himself the prediction contained in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848;

"Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular a portion of the bourgeois ideologists who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."<sup>47</sup>

One can take it for granted that this passage of the *Manifesto* (which he devoured, along with the first book of *Capital*, in 1883) made a deep impression upon Morris's outlook. He reproduced it almost word for word in a letter to T. C. Horsfall on 25 October.<sup>48</sup> Less than a month later, on 14 November, speaking at a meeting in Oxford, with Ruskin in the chair, he used similar language.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, it would always be as a bourgeois adhering to socialism that he would introduce himself to working-class audiences, and chairmen at his lectures would stress this fact and its significance.<sup>50</sup>

This adherence was without reservation, and Morris accepted without jibbing for one moment the restrictions of the militant way of life. His devotion has remained a legend and is the more praiseworthy because nothing had prepared him for so great a sacrifice of time, money, peace of mind and comfort. Long afterwards, his daughter May still marvelled at such complete self-sacrifice on the part of a man for whom bourgeois ease had always provided a pleasant life.<sup>51</sup> But Morris felt himself drawn into the struggle by a kind of fate. He readily agreed that, if the times had been more peaceful, he might have been "contented amidst his discontent" and have settled down, as it were, in a hermitage.<sup>52</sup> He recognised, too, that he was not by nature inclined to be a fighter and that he preferred lazily dreaming; that he might have felt more at ease in a "moderate socialist" party and even found it a way to satisfy his vanity, because he could easily have become the leader of one. It would have been sufficient for him to follow his inclinations and deceive himself, but



such a lie horrified him.<sup>53</sup> His socialism was not moderate, it was revolutionary, and he humbly accepted the most irksome militant tasks without ever displaying the slightest political ambition. There certainly seemed to be a blatant contradiction between his upper-bourgeois home life, and his unending and demanding travels as a propagandist. The reactionary press had a fine time finding material for the most unjust and unworthy jeers.<sup>54</sup>

Morris's first steps towards socialism and his joining the Democratic Federation in 1883 were perhaps made easier by the fact that this group still had few links with the working class and that almost all its leaders belonged to middle and upper class circles, as he recalled himself in 1894.<sup>55</sup> He thus was spared the disconcerting shock of immediate contact with the working masses, for which there had been nothing to prepare him.

In his thesis, Mr Eugene Le Mire has gathered some information about the founders of the Democratic Federation,<sup>56</sup> and I quote from it, adding a little more. Henry S. Salt and J. L. Joynes had both been masters at Eton.<sup>57</sup> Edward Carpenter had been Fellow of Trinity Hall at Cambridge.<sup>58</sup> E. Belfort Bax was a member of the Bar.<sup>59</sup> As for Hyndman, the president of the Federation, with whom Morris had most contacts, he was a stockbroker.<sup>60</sup> We may add the names of H. Hyde Champion, an artillery officer<sup>61</sup>, and his friend R. P. B. Frost, like him an ex-Marlborough pupil.<sup>62</sup> They provided a curious spectacle, these members of good society, led by Hyndman in immaculate frockcoat and top hat, selling the socialist weekly *Justice* in Fleet Street and the Strand.<sup>63</sup>

Hyndman was certainly less well-off than Morris, but both in his dress and his bearing he was the very incarnation of bourgeois respectability. He was a complex person and the ambiguity of his motives has never been clearly resolved, either by his memoirs or by the studies made of him. Despite his unbudging hostility towards Engels ("the Grand Lama of the Regents Park Road", as he called him),<sup>64</sup> he remained true to Marx's doctrine, or believed he was true. His militant activity was considerable and no doubt could be cast upon his devotion. But, contrary to what took place in Morris's case, his bourgeois consciousness remained alive to the end, and seems to have been one of the decisive factors in the political attitudes he adopted in later years, which earned him bitter denunciation from Lenin.<sup>65</sup> This man was a strange socialist: when he was expelled from the New University Club following his agitation among London's unemployed, and not having been able to afford, because of his financial contribution to the S.D.F., to maintain his membership of the Garrick, he felt disconcerted at no longer belonging to any club.<sup>66</sup> His appearance and his manners, as much as his dictatorial methods, did not arouse sympathy in socialist circles<sup>67</sup> and it was only through tenacity and devotion that he maintained his authority over the S.D.F. and kept it alive for a surprisingly long time.

It is interesting to note the difference in tone between the "we of the middle classes" of Morris and Hyndman's "my class".<sup>68</sup> At almost all public meetings, Hyndman used this expression with provocative cynicism and lashed the apathy of his working-class listeners by ironically thanking them for maintaining his class. This unamiable course often annoyed Tom Mann, who, nevertheless, remained one of his faithful supporters.<sup>69</sup> There was nothing so contemptuous in Morris's attitude and, when he joined the Democratic

Federation, he was already losing his illusions about the leading rôle of the bourgeoisie and did not take himself to be a liberating Messiah; Marx had convinced him that the emancipation of the workers would be the work of the workers themselves.

Such was not the opinion of Hyndman, according to whom "a slave-class cannot be freed by the slaves themselves".<sup>70</sup>

It is not very likely that differences showed between Hyndman and Morris on the subject at this stage, at least until the second half of 1884. They were both sincere and ardent socialists, and points of agreement were clearly more numerous than points of discord. It is not surprising, moreover, that the propaganda efforts of the young organisation were directed not only towards the working class, to whom the mechanism of its exploitation needed explaining, but also, in an explicit way, to the middle classes, who needed reassuring: the socialist aim, jointly wrote Hyndman, Morris and Taylor, in an article published in *Justice* in January 1884, was to show them that socialism was a serious scientific theory and that, far from fomenting anarchy, it had as its only objective to put a beneficent society in place of the disorder of present society.<sup>71</sup> Reassuring words both for the public and for the authors themselves.

Problems, however, were not long in arising. First was the discovery of working-class poverty, the facts of which seem to have come to Morris as from a distant, almost unsuspected country<sup>72</sup> and which, he said, impinged upon his bourgeois sensibility and filled him with naive astonishment and horror.<sup>73</sup> Already, during his pre-socialist period, sights in the streets had made him feel that he owed it to chance alone that he had been "born respectable and rich"<sup>74</sup> and enjoyed a pleasant life.<sup>75</sup> Even earlier on he had felt shame and personal responsibility at such sights.<sup>76</sup> This feeling could not but deepen after his coming to socialism, and Morris, in the presence of the contrast between the joy of his work and the enslavement of the majority of his fellows,<sup>77</sup> was "... ashamed of his own position ..."<sup>78</sup> He publicly admitted during a debate that he had an uneasy conscience over occupying himself with art and literature while the masses were "doomed to such a sordid and miserable life of servitude".<sup>79</sup> This feeling grew steadily stronger and was more and more expressed in his lectures and articles.<sup>80</sup> By 1885 it must have been extremely strong, for Morris felt obliged to give it expression in the official text of the Manifesto of the Socialist League.<sup>81</sup>

Ruskin had felt similar shame and expressed a desire to find "a byework to quiet my conscience".<sup>82</sup> But with him it was only a passing pang flattering to his Protestant introspection, a whim leading only to abortive undertakings with no future. For Morris, on the other hand, there was a permanent and painful contradiction, the essential motive for his militant activity and his utopian quest. This contradiction drove him to analyse, and the analysis sharpened the contradiction. The Marxist concept of surplus value made him feel, not only an accomplice to exploitation, but one who profited by it.<sup>83</sup> This caused him real pain, and the revolution, the building of a classless society, became for him, belonging to the exploiting class, an absolute personal necessity. He reached the point of declaring that the situation of "slaveowner" was more wretched and shameful than that of the slave himself.<sup>84</sup>

But strong roots attached him to his class and he did not stop imploring it to

understand and to join him in the struggle. When he reached political maturity, these appeals stemmed more from the needs of propaganda for unity, but in the beginning he was pathetically direct in his appeals. His 1884 lecture, *Art and Socialism*, is wholly aimed in this direction. After having, still in terms that lack precision, sat in judgment on the system of *laissez-faire* and commercial competition, he sketches the picture of a happy society, "the reverse of the present state of things", and asks: "How can we of the middle classes help to bring such a state of things about?"<sup>85</sup> How can we "clear our own consciences of the guilt of enslaving men by their labour . . . Can the middle-classes regenerate themselves?"<sup>86</sup> He refers to the energy displayed by his class in overcoming the forces of nature, but he is no longer the optimist of 1881: "And yet I doubt it: their own creation, the Commerce they are so proud of, has become their master."<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, repressing his own doubts, he appeals to the hearts of his bourgeois listeners, he paints the lot of the "class of victims" and shows them the way to salvation:

"And how can we of the middle-classes, we the capitalists, and our hangers-on, help them? By renouncing our class, and on all occasions when antagonism rises up between the classes casting in our lot with the victims . . . There is *no* other way: and this way I tell you plainly, will in the long run give us plentiful occasion for self-sacrifice . . ." <sup>88</sup>

He concludes by inviting them to join the Democratic Fédération without hiding all the material and moral risks to which such membership would expose them. Despite the sincere emotion of this appeal, it is presented in a very clumsy way, doubtless on account of its very sincerity, and there was little chance of its being heeded.

Morris probably dealt with the same theme in the lecture entitled "What's to become of the Middle Classes?", given in Hammersmith on 23 August 1885, the text of which has been lost.<sup>89</sup> There is something deeply touching in this painful fidelity to his origins, which was expressed in various ways. In the course of the present study we shall see that Morris always avoided confusing the bourgeois with the bourgeoisie. He believed in the natural goodness of man and that it was historical fate that made them cruel exploiters, not as individuals but as a class. Just as he offered his middle-class listeners immediate redemption by acceptance of socialism, this solicitude followed him into his utopia, for one of the tasks of the new society was to ensure the reintegration and ultimate regeneration of the defeated bourgeoisie.

These approaches and appeals met with little response. The risks to deserters from the middle classes after their conversion to socialism, of which he charitably warned his audience in his 1884 lecture, *Art and Socialism*, were real risks, and others were prudent enough to leave him to verify their reality on his own.<sup>90</sup> It is true that his material position was too firmly based for there to be any danger of his losing it, but he became a target for jeers and unworthy attacks by the whole press, which did not greatly affect him, and he found people he esteemed becoming cold and even turning away from him.<sup>91</sup> These were certainly pinpricks to which he was sensitive.<sup>92</sup> He must have been still more so to the attitude of Jane, who did not hide her lack of enthusiasm for her husband's socialist visitors.<sup>93</sup>

He stood firm, and went further. But other disappointments awaited him at



the beginning of his militant career. Probably the most serious was the difficulty he found in adapting himself to working-class audiences. Despite his burning sympathy and the zeal of his new conversion, he could not rid himself of a superior attitude.<sup>94</sup> In a letter sent on 7 May 1883 to his elder daughter, Jenny, we find an account of his first experience: "One thing I would not praise them for, to wit that they kept dropping [in] all the time or nearly so, till the room, which was only half full when I began, was crowded at the end . . . I must tell you however that I behaved badly; for 2 young women close to me would keep whispering and giggling, which made me so nervous, that at last I laid down my Ms and said 'I will go on when you have left off whispering and giggling'."<sup>95</sup> But nothing put him off and the occasions on which he addressed audiences of the people became more and more frequent, without his feeling however any more at ease. Two years later, in a letter to Mrs Burne-Jones, we find these very revealing lines:

"You would perhaps have smiled at my congregation; some twenty people in a little room, as dirty as convenient and stinking a good deal. It took the fire out of my fine periods, I can tell you: it is a great drawback that I can't talk to them roughly and unaffectedly. Also I would like to know what amount of real feeling underlies their bombastic revolutionary talk when they get to that. I don't seem to have got at them yet – you see this great class gulf lies between us . . ." <sup>96</sup>

This naked confession demands respect. So many bourgeois intellectuals, after a period of flirting with the working class, have returned to their ivory towers or have become hostile and aggressive. Morris was aware of what he was and of what the proletarian masses of the 'eighties still were. He had no illusions about himself or about them. But he was moved by his fundamental revolt against injustice and also by the conviction, drawn from his reading of Marx, that historically it is the function of the working class to destroy the capitalist production relationships and inaugurate the classless society into which his quest for utopia was already venturing. He carried on his militant task in order to bring to the unorganised masses the ideological weapons they needed, despite disappointment and friction and despite another feeling that sometimes haunted his bourgeois conscience during these early years of struggle. This revolution, for which he prayed, frightened him at the same time, not by its inevitable violence, which he readily accepted at that time, but by its outcome. His apprehension of the coming to power of what "no history has yet shown us – what is swiftly advancing upon us – a class which, though it shall have attained knowledge, shall lack utterly the refinement and self-respect which comes from the union of knowledge with leisure and ease of life. The growth of such a class may well make the cultured people of today tremble."<sup>97</sup> He is undoubtedly being ironical at the expense of the latter, but nothing in his lecture sets out to dissipate their apprehension. Certainly, this was only a passing feeling, every trace of which subsequently disappeared, and the expression of it bears witness to the sincerity, thoughtfulness, and pertinacity of Morris. But it also indicates a shrewd appreciation of his own position. His revolutionary enthusiasm and his indignation at working-class poverty were never to lead him into meretricious demagoguery. He never sought to identify himself with the proletariat or pretend to express his revolt and



aspirations "from within". In *The Pilgrims of Hope* (1885-86), which is his most "committed" poem, the hero is not a proletarian but a young ruined bourgeois, reduced to earning a workshop living.<sup>98</sup>

This dignified reserve does credit to Morris as a writer. In the field of action, however, his inability to put himself in the shoes of the workers led him into equivocal positions up to the beginning of the 'nineties. He could not grasp the political necessities as readily as the human needs behind immediate demands. With his eyes fixed on the ultimate goal, sickened by the petty-bourgeois socialism of the Fabians and the compromises of the parliamentary game, he imprisoned himself in rigid doctrine, a leftist formalism which represented to him the royal road to utopia. Without doubt, at this time the first enemy for the young revolutionary movement to fight was reformism, and so it remained up to the Leninist period. But Morris's uncompromising anti-reformism led him to despise not only the "palliatives" achieved by parliamentary means, but also the partial victories of the trade union struggle. Whatever reservations might be justified by the behaviour of trade union leaders, he did not appreciate that in the unions were to be found the working masses, towards whom the essential effort of his propaganda should be directed, and that strikes and mass action, however modest the results achieved, were indispensable stages on the road to socialism. Cut off in this way from fundamental reality, disposed to see the working class in an abstract vision, he long held on to illusions about the imminence of revolution, and the knell sounded only after Bloody Sunday in 1887. It needed the thunderclap of the dockers' strike in 1889 to bring him gradually to a more realistic appreciation of the fight for immediate demands, tearing him at last from that formalism which, though he did not understand this, was the consequence of the limitations of a bourgeois viewpoint, and not of a superior understanding of revolutionary action. Nor did he realise, moreover, that this very formalism, which isolated him for several years from the true mass movement, held nothing to frighten the middle classes, quite the contrary. As E. P. Thompson cogently remarked: "It became even fashionable for the young *avant-garde* of the bourgeoisie to pay at least one visit to the converted out-house", transformed into a meeting-hall, which flanked the Hammersmith house."<sup>99</sup>

We have found, in Bernard Shaw's papers, a letter from May Morris, dated 25 November 1886, in which she says: "The 'damned bourgeois branch', as Leaguers have been pleased to call the Hammersmith Branch, is going to have a party on Jan. 1st."<sup>100</sup> And, looking at it from a different angle, there is another fact worthy of comment. Morris's formalism significantly impoverished his propaganda towards the working class, because he proved incapable of mustering his arguments with concrete examples, directly drawn from the workers' experience of the day-to-day fight. Being unable to really talk to them about themselves, and about reality as they knew it, he was left only with the prospects offered by utopia, convinced that, thanks to the culture with which his birth had endowed him, he could in this way give form and expression to the deep aspirations which were confused in their minds because of their stupefying poverty.<sup>101</sup>

However, in his own organisation, in the very bosom of the Socialist League of which he was founder and leader, a severe voice had been raised which must have given him a great deal to think about by its personal and direct way of

denouncing the very roots of the evil. Thomas Binning, an honoured militant of the printing union, with full-time responsibility for the publication of *Commonweal*, specialist on workers' matters in the League's weekly, was not himself entirely free from similar failings.<sup>102</sup> But he was a worker, tied to the masses, and when, in 1888, Morris, in the columns of *Commonweal*, delivered a somewhat outspoken attack on "practical socialism", he felt stung to the quick and retorted with a letter published on 25 February:

"It is all very well for people in comfortable circumstances to go in for the 'whole hog', to deprecate the vulgar comfort of the middle classes, and to make light of ameliorative changes in the condition of the workers. But those whose daily life is brightened and made happier and more hopeful by these little changes so slightly spoken of are not likely to be favourably influenced by the abstract notions of the doctrinaires."<sup>103</sup>

The judgment, terse as it was, was clear-sighted, but the lesson was too hard to bear fruit at once.

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There were, then, all these internal contradictions to be resolved. There were also what we might call external contradictions, those imposed upon him, not by the stirrings of his conscience, but questions inevitably raised in the world in which he moved by his belonging to both the bourgeois class and the socialist movement. This state of affairs aroused venomous spite in the hostile press,<sup>104</sup> but William Morris cared little for such attacks. On the other hand, he was responsive to the questions, sometimes aggressive and sometimes perplexed, addressed to him by popular audiences and he early felt the need to clarify his exact place in the social scale. He no longer had any direct links with finance capital since he had, in 1876, resigned from the board of Devon Great Consols, and he had been so delighted at having done so that, back home from the meeting, he had solemnly sat on his top-hat.<sup>105</sup> He was, of course, an employer of paid labour, but, in view of the medium scale of his business and the nature of the work, he refused to wear the label of capitalist.<sup>106</sup> The term would, in fact, have suggested a level of fortune he was far from possessing; and he insisted over and over that he was not so rich as was claimed.<sup>107</sup> Was he not obliged to sell the luxurious products of the Morris Firm to people much richer than himself? It is true that even that fact was once reckoned a crime by a militant socialist in Glasgow.<sup>108</sup> This very point indeed, was one of Morris's personal sorrows, and his daughter May thought it one of the main reasons for his becoming a socialist.<sup>109</sup> It was certainly this melancholy realisation that allowed him to place himself, not without bitterness, in a well-defined category. "I am not a capitalist, my friend," he wrote to Mrs. Burne-Jones, "I am but a hanger-on on that class, like all professional men",<sup>110</sup> and he did not hesitate so to describe himself in his public lectures.<sup>111</sup>

It would probably be dishonest to doubt his sincerity and suppose that he was trying in this way to avoid burning questions. They could not fail to come up, and had come up already. Did he not belong to the employing class and how was he to reconcile this fact with his socialism? In 1883 the question was asked by a reader in the columns of the *Standard*, and Morris replied at once to the editor of that paper:

"I freely admit that this position is a false one, but it seems to me that its falseness is first felt by an honest man, not when he begins to express his opinion openly, and to further openly the spread of Socialism, but when his conscience is first pricked by a sense of the injustice and stupidity of the present state of society. Your correspondent implies that, to be consistent, we should at once cast aside our position as capitalists, and take rank with the proletariat; but he must excuse my saying that he knows very well that we are not able to do so; that the most we can do is to palliate, as far as we can, the evils of the unjust system which we are forced to sustain;<sup>112</sup> that we are but minute links in the immense chain of the terrible organisation of competitive commerce, and that only the complete unrivetting of that chain will really free us. It is this very sense of the helplessness of our individual efforts which arms us against our own class, which compels us to take an active part in the agitation which, if it be successful, will deprive us of our capitalist position."<sup>113</sup>

This first skirmish remained on the plane of generalities, and Morris's reply was one of irreproachable logic. His reaction was expressed in a letter to Mrs. Burne-Jones in November 1888: "I have been living in a storm of newspaper brickbats, to some of which I had to reply: of course I don't mind a bit nor even think the attack unfair".<sup>114</sup> In the following year, matters took a more direct and more serious turn. On 4 February 1884, during a debate at the Cambridge Union Society: "The opposer Mr. Frost, a Cambridge Graduate, . . . tried to excite the merriment of the house, and then condescended to personalities, by asking Mr. Morris to account for his position as an employer . . . Mr. William Morris . . . explained the impossibility of avoiding the responsibility which capital in the present state of society confers, and avowed his readiness to resign his position as soon as ever the State should be able to step in and take his place, pointing out the utter uselessness of merely handing over capital to another capitalist while the certainty of its being used for the exploitation of labour remains unassailed. This the audience seemed capable of understanding, and they cheered accordingly."<sup>115</sup>

All that was not going very far, but it appears that, from the early months of 1884, these attacks seriously worried Morris. The long letter of 1st June 1884 to Mrs. Burne-Jones is clearly the conclusion of a discussion on this subject that had been going on for some time in earlier letters that have disappeared.<sup>116</sup> From this letter we can draw several important pointers. First of all, Morris, who knew his *Capital* very well, observes that the capitalist's profit only constitutes a part of the general exploitation and that "co-operation, to be real, must be the rule and not the exception". If he renounced his personal profit and shared the Firm's balance equally among all the workers, what would be the result? He calculates that it would represent an annual increase of £16 each, which would obviously be pleasant, "but leave them still members of the working class with all the disadvantages of that position". So what was to be done?

"... Here then is a choice for a manufacturer ashamed of living on surplus value: shall he do his best to further a revolution on the basis of society . . . which would turn all people into workers, as it would give a chance for all workers to become refined and dignified in their life; or



shall he ease his conscience by dropping a certain portion of his profits to bestow on his handful of workers,<sup>117</sup> for indeed it is but charity after all . . . Well I say what shall he do? The second choice if he takes it, may save a few individuals a certain amount of suffering and anxiety, therefore if he *can* do both things let him do so, and make his conscience surer; but if, as must generally be the case, he must choose between the furthering of a great principle, and the staunching of 'the pangs of conscience', I should think it right to choose the first course: because although it is *possible* that here and there a capitalist may be found who could and would be content to carry on his business at (say) foreman's wages, it is impossible that the capitalist class could do so: the very point of its existence is manufacturing for a profit and not for a livelihood."<sup>118</sup>

So Morris's decision was taken: he rejected a personal solution which would not advance the cause by one inch. That cannot have happened without long arguments with himself and with his friends. Why, one may wonder, *could* he not do "both things at the same time", as he stressed himself? For his part he would have been willing to live on four pounds a week, and he added, "if Janey and Jenny were quite well and capable I think they ought not to grumble at living on the said £4, nor do I think they would".<sup>119</sup> That is certainly a bold supposition. One can hardly see Jane accepting a proposal of that kind and there is no doubt that Jenny's health caused Morris grave worry. These considerations certainly played a part in his final decision, just as much as did considerations of an ideological nature. We find proof of it in the private diary of Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson. He and his wife Annie were a somewhat odd couple who had, with much affectation, renounced the world to practise the "simple life", devoting themselves to vegetarianism and book-binding. They had fairly close links with Morris, and tried to influence him. The diary entry of 16 January 1884 reads: "We told him we thought he ought to put his principles into practice in his own case: that his appeal would be much more powerful if he did so. He said he was in a corner and could not, that no one person could; that to say the truth, he was a coward and feared to do so; that there was his wife, and the girls; and how could he put it upon them? . . . Dear old Morris, he would be happier if he could put his ideas into practice".<sup>120</sup> Perhaps it is as well not to put too much trust in Cobden-Sanderson, bearing in mind his condescending priggishness; but we have definite indications that in January 1884 the problem was facing Morris in personal terms.

He touched on the same problem in a letter to an American, Emma Lazarus, in April 1884. Written to a woman infinitely less close to him than Georgiana Burne-Jones, it is of less direct interest and scarcely adds anything to what he wrote to that friend two months later. Nevertheless, he stresses one idea that we find recurring in all his work, that production co-operatives in the present situation cannot be anything other than a larval form of capitalism.<sup>121</sup>

Morris had, however, introduced a partial profit-sharing system into his business, of which his questioners and critics were generally ignorant. This system directly involved the general manager, George Wardle, as well as four workshop directors and, indirectly, two foremen who received production bonuses.<sup>122</sup>

The attacks on Morris never stopped. In 1885, an anonymous journalist in



the *Saturday Review* reproached him in these terms: "... he left off poetry, which he understood, and took to politics of which he knows nothing ... the fact of a capitalist and 'profit-monger' denouncing capitalists and profit-mongers without, as far as is known, making the least attempt to pour his capital into the lap of the treasurer of the Socialist Church, or to divide his profits weekly with the sons of toil who make them".<sup>123</sup> The article was pompously entitled: *Nephelococcygia-Lez-Hammersmith*. A few weeks later, the *Oxford Times*, in scarcely less abusive terms, returned to the same questions: "Nobody wishes him to escape from the vicious circle of modern society, nor to hand over his accumulated profits to some capitalist who might not make so good use of them as he; but surely it is not much to ask him to divide the surplus profits of the labour of the concern over which he presides equally among those who help to realize them. This, however, is a view of the case which, socialist as he is, the apostle of socialism declines to adopt; and with his tenderness for his own pocket, many of his abstract arguments go by the board".<sup>124</sup> In 1890 again, Morris was interviewed by one of the editorial staff of *Cassell's Sunday Journal*: "Q.: Meanwhile, they say, you ought to share publicly whatever you have got, and run the concern for the good of the community. - A.: What good would I do by that? I am not fighting individuals, I am attacking a system. How could I attack it more effectually by reducing myself to the proletariat level?"<sup>125</sup> In the discussions following his lectures the same question constantly cropped up: "Why don't you carry out your Socialist principles in connection with your own business?": "Was it consistent for Socialists to be capitalists?"<sup>126</sup> Sometimes the question was put in a more general way. When, one day, Morris was asked: "If you believe so much in what you say, why don't you give your money to the poor?" he replied: "I am not a very rich man, but even if I were to give all my money away, what good would that do? The poor would be just as poor, the rich, perhaps, a little more rich, for my wealth would finally get into their hands. The world would be pleased to talk about me for three days until something new caught its fancy. Even if Rothschild gave away his millions tomorrow, the same problems would confront us the day after".<sup>127</sup> In replying to these questions he knew how to raise the level of the argument. In an article in *Commonweal*, he showed that workers' sharing in profits was a trap, and was tantamount to "feeding the dog with its own tail". It would be a way of inducing the workers to increase their productivity and it would sidetrack them" by deluding them into thinking that their interests are at one with those of their masters".<sup>128</sup>

It is remarkable that Morris, so readily aroused in argument and discussion, to the point at times of losing all control of himself, could always maintain exemplary calm and patience whenever this topic was raised. The decision he had taken was the climax of a long and painful struggle with his conscience, calling into play his innermost feelings as well as his theoretical thinking. The contradiction in his life was plain to him in the broadest sense. He had chosen his stand and the solution which seemed proper to him. The debate was over and he lived with his contradiction, slowly making himself work it out in action and in utopia.

The intense political agitation into which Morris threw himself during the 'eighties was the product of deep conviction and also, probably, of a need to resolve this contradiction, to put an end to these "pangs of conscience" which tormented him. He must have succeeded to an appreciable extent, because his contacts with the working class became easier and more cordial. When one thinks of the ignorance, the prejudices, the physical revulsion which reared an insurmountable barrier between the Victorian bourgeoisie and the urban proletariat,<sup>129</sup> when one thinks of the reticence and attitudes of other socialist intellectuals like Hyndman or Shaw, or writers like Gissing, it is impressive to recognise how far Morris had gone beyond the "river of fire" in this new world with its spreading human warmth. He no longer had to spend weeks over drafting his speeches. Now he improvised on street corners. As E. P. Thompson so appositely notes, the finest homage in this connection paid to 'comrade Morris' came from his companion in the struggle Frank Kitz, an East End worker little disposed to tolerate the airs of a great gentleman:

"So convinced was he of the utility of open-air propaganda that he stood by my side on many a windy, inclement night at the corner of some wretched East-End slum whilst I endeavoured to gain him an audience . . . He had no feeling of contempt for those who do the rough work of the movement . . . Although his audience were at first somewhat mystified by his method of delivering his message, for he was no great orator, they gradually grasped his meaning: and as he preached to those toil-worn crowds in the gloomy East-End byways . . . he would warm to his subject, and his audience would enter into the spirit of his address".<sup>130</sup>

Morris established warm human relationships not only during public meetings but also in the long conversations he had during his long canvasses with local militants. Throughout Glasier's book we find the echo of these talks, their friendly, simple ease and the 'pleasure the poet experienced in being among the workers.'<sup>131</sup> He no longer felt apprehensive; his mind, more critical now towards his own class, was no longer shocked by the lack of 'refinement' or 'dignity' and found other human qualities. He was conscious of this change and found great peace and deep satisfaction in it, as is indicated by a tiny incident recorded in Yeats's autobiography.<sup>132</sup>

His natural simplicity, the little care he took over his appearance, his lack of affectation, setting him so clearly apart from Hyndman, helped to lessen the distances. But the fact that Morris was a manual as much as an intellectual worker helped even more. He knew and practised himself the techniques of many of the artistic and craft activities of the Firm. He could handle tools and trades, he ground his colours and plunged his hands into the vats of dye. When he spoke to the workers, it was not only about politics: "He chatted in a chummy way with those around him, asking about their employment, and surprising us all by his acquaintance with the practical skill and usages of their crafts."<sup>133</sup>

For the same reasons he never had any difficulty in his dealings with his own workers, to whom, incidentally, he paid wages above the average.<sup>134</sup> On the evidence of George Wardle: "He substituted piece work founded on the advanced rates of wages of the time work whenever the occupation permitted it, thus giving the workman a greater liberty as to the disposal of his time . . .

Piece workers . . . could then occasionally knock off for an hour's work in the garden – the garden having been allotted in sections to the piece workers . . . Any objection or claim made by the workman was listened to as if it came from an equal and decided according to the equity of the case . . . No one having worked for Mr. Morris would willingly have joined any other workshop".<sup>135</sup> In an attempt to bring into the present his utopian view of the workplace, Morris had made Merton Abbey into a pleasant spot,<sup>136</sup> and his enthusiasm aroused the love of beauty in them. With justified pride he could speak of the works of art that came from their hands, when replying to opponents in public meetings who questioned him on his equivocal situation.<sup>137</sup> It is noteworthy, too, that no question or reproach on this subject ever came from his own workers,<sup>138</sup> and he even had the joy of seeing seven of them spontaneously set up a local group of the Democratic Federation. Nonetheless, he remained obliged to put off into the future the chance of being a worker among workers, putting his talents at the service of a socialist community for a worker's wages.<sup>140</sup> In the evening he returned to Kelmscott House and, when he was exhausted by work, he went and relaxed in the calm of Kelmscott Manor. The utopist, seeking relief in the future from a guilt-feeling, plunged back into the bourgeois sources of his utopia.

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In fact, consciousness of his origins pursued him into his own utopia. Even when he is unfolding to his audience visions of abundance and happiness, he will abruptly interrupt himself:

"I daresay that you will find some of my visions strange enough. One reason which will make some of you think them strange is a sad and shameful one. I have always belonged to the well-to-do classes, and was born into luxury, so that necessarily I ask much more of the future than many of you do."<sup>141</sup>

Against this, as he declared towards the end of his life, precisely because he was a bourgeois who had not known the daily difficulties of existence, he could never have become a militant socialist other than by the utopian road: only an ideal could bring him to practical action.<sup>142</sup> Such an assertion is surely going too far, and seems to derive from a humble and blameworthy effort to indicate a superiority of awareness on the part of the proletarian class. Before 1883, in fact, one hardly finds in Morris's writings anything more than utopian *aspirations*. Utopia only really assumed shape and substance in his mind during his years of militant action. If, as we have seen, the approach to utopia gave direction and strength to his militant action, it was from this and from the theoretical thought accompanying it that utopia drew its essential sustenance; we shall find many opportunities of observing this. Utopia was at once cause and effect and this unceasing interplay was at all times the product of class motivation.

*News from Nowhere* describes a communist society two hundred years after the revolution, a society from which social classes have disappeared. But the vision of that future world is not absolutely free from every bourgeois tinge. William Guest, "the man from another planet", whom Morris, with a touch of



false naivety, casts in the rôle of foil, is a socialist from the nineteenth century, in fact, the bourgeois socialist Morris himself. We may wonder what would have been the reactions of a working-class socialist, a Frank Kitz, a Tom Mann, a Maguire, Mahon, Binning, had one arrived in Morris's utopian world. Doubtless, in two hundred years the characteristic outlooks of each social layer have had time to disappear, and society has become homogeneous. There is really nothing proletarian left in this world. It is true that descriptions of work are lacking, apart from the idyllic vision of haymaking and the building work of the "Obstinate Refusers". The dustman in the gold-embroidered overcoat is seen only in his gorgeous apparel and we have some difficulty over picturing him about his professional tasks. If, then, the persons in the story have absolutely nothing about them suggesting either close or remote working-class ancestry, can we certainly declare that nothing bourgeois remains about them either? We will not speak of Ellen's father (or grandfather),<sup>143</sup> who has to a dreadful degree the manner of a little Victorian rentier. But the "positive" heroes, like Dick and Clara? Haven't they a way of life and a manner of talking that we can easily find among many English couples from cultured and comfortable surroundings?<sup>144</sup> Don't we get the feeling that in sketching a picture of a classless society Morris has stolen all the bedclothes, and proposed as model whatever was best in his own milieu? The bourgeoisie against which he rails is that of enriched cockneys, not his own. The indignation expressed by Morris against Bellamy's "cockney paradise" is quite justified, and the contrast between the two utopias is certainly striking. There is not a trace in *News from Nowhere* of the philistine climate of *Looking Backward*. In condemning the American writer's prophetic vision, Morris expressed a very interesting judgment:

"The only ideal of life," he thinks, "which such a man can see is that of the industrious *professional* middle-class men of today purified from their crime of complicity with the monopolist class and become independent instead of being, as they now are, parasitical."<sup>145</sup>

Doubtless it is so, but is he sure that this reproach does not reflect back, at least to some small degree, on its author? And is not this desire for purification a more tender spot with Morris than with Bellamy?

It seems to me that, had we put such questions to Morris, he would not have protested, but would, on the contrary, have humbly agreed and even gone unnecessarily further, so great was his anxiety to resolve his contradictions and escape the original curse. In a practical sense, is there no other purpose in his utopia? Is it not advance preparation for escape? He replies unambiguously in the text of the narrative:

"Here I could enjoy everything without an afterthought of the injustice and miserable toil which made my leisure; the ignorance and dullness of life which went to make my keen appreciation of history; the tyranny and the struggle full of fear and mishap which went to make my romance."<sup>146</sup>

There is an almost despairing note to this admission. It has the same bitterness as the period when he wrote:

"But he who is rebel and rich may live safe for many a year,  
While he warms his heart with pictures of all the glory to come."<sup>147</sup>



In *News from Nowhere*, after expulsion from paradise on earth the return to the dominance of bourgeois society is presented symbolically as a "black cloud rolling along to meet me, like a nightmare of my childish days".<sup>148</sup> But another symbol is even more striking, that of the wretched old villager he passes on the road and who greets him obsequiously. Morris is out of the egalitarian world of his dreams, he is again one who attracts servile greetings from the "lower classes". It is easier to exorcise gods than demons.



PART TWO

SOURCES AND INFLUENCES





## *Foreword*

In most studies devoted to a writer or to an aspect of his work, research into "sources and influences" constitutes a part of the work notorious for erudite sterility, which the reader is often tempted to skim or even skip. So my disquiet and hesitation are understandable. I finally decided to embark upon this thankless task because it seemed indispensable. A preliminary explanation is needed; it is very simple and I hope it will be convincing.

The whole of my analyses and discoveries inclines me to think that, in fact, the main inspiration and starting point of Morris's utopia are to be sought in Marxism. However, I am obliged to record that, despite the brief but lucid summary from R. Page Arnot, who played a pioneer rôle, and despite the extraordinary wealth of the political biography written by E. P. Thompson, critics are almost unanimous in declaring that William Morris was the opposite of a Marxist. The essence of my task will consist of an attempt to resolve this argument. It may be objected that the effort could have been restricted to that. The temptation was great, but the result would scarcely have been satisfactory. Other influences are intermingled with the one I find predominant. Certainly it is equally my conviction that these other influences have been profoundly transformed, digested, assimilated by the determining ideology. But their existence is indisputable and to pass them over in silence would distort the viewpoint, upset the balance, pervert the truth. I take a stand solely upon the complexity of the facts.

This search for sources is imposed by Morris himself. He was a man of excessive modesty. Although he felt at ease in the sphere of art, he tended to consider himself inept at handling ideas, to respect the judgment of those he considered more competent than himself and to deny himself all originality. "... though my mouth alone speaks," he said to his listeners at one of his first lectures, "it speaks, however feebly and disjointedly, the thoughts of many men better than myself."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly he increased in assurance later on, but he never looked upon himself as an individual thinker bearing a new message. He was prevented, not only by his modesty, but also by his fundamental feeling for the continuity of history. "Inspiration," he declared several years later, "means the hope and the fruition of pleasure which fills a man as he receives from the minds of those who came before him to give to his fellows now living and to those that shall live."<sup>2</sup> From 1885, when his mature judgment became saturated with dialectical materialism, this sense of the continuity of history took on deeper intensity as the prospect of utopia opened out before him. More than ever he claimed the heritage of all that was best in the past, but by then it was no longer a simple matter of transfer. History was no longer a circle, but a

spiral, and earlier messages would assume growing value as they were transformed by the rising curves of human development. So there was in him the consciousness of a many-sided, lasting debt that he explicitly recognised throughout his work.

At first glance, this facilitates my task. It is enough for me to collect the names of all the leaders of thought whom he quotes himself, or for whom, according to the evidence of his contemporaries, he showed special enthusiasm. I am encouraged to go about it in this way all the more because Morris was at once a ravenous and strangely selective reader. Burne-Jones noted that he "had a great instinct at all times for knowing what would not amuse him and what not to read",<sup>3</sup> and Mackail confirms this characteristic: "He always knew whether he wanted to read a book or not, and when he did not, nothing could induce him to read it."<sup>4</sup> One other indication will be valuable to us. In 1886, the *Pall Mall Gazette* sent a questionnaire to a number of writers asking for a list of their hundred favourite books. Morris's reply contained fifty-four titles,<sup>5</sup> excluding all works of philosophy, economics or history, which, he wrote, are "rather tools than books". So his choice was very limited, but far from negligible because the list only contained, he said, works which had "profoundly impressed" him.

It may perhaps be surprising that I have not purely and simply used the list to headline the following pages. I was careful not to; first, let us remember that the present study is concerned strictly with the *utopian* thought of William Morris, to the exclusion of all his other innumerable activities. So my purpose is to seek *only* the inspirations of his utopia. If some of the authors have made a "profound impression" upon him, it does not necessarily follow that they have exercised any influence in this direction. Conversely, a number of writers not mentioned may have "impressed" him less, but incontestably influenced him. There are even certain individuals whom he attacked in various circumstances, sometimes harshly, sometimes with sympathy, like Henry George, Edward Bellamy or Kropotkin, contact with whom nevertheless greatly enriched him (sometimes in unexpected ways). Finally, there are authors he perhaps never read, but who were discussed around him (for example, certain French socialist utopists): they were influences which were "in the air", as the saying goes. We are even less able to neglect them since their names figure in the theoretical handbook, *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, which Morris wrote with Bax in 1893: caution will obviously be needed as we get into regions of what cannot be checked. The same caution will be necessary when we come across reminiscences which are perhaps no more than coincidental.

In a general way, and at the assured risk of producing an incomplete work, I shall limit my enquiry strictly to ideology. More strictly still, because my concern not to let this study grow to monstrous dimensions forces me to make arbitrary selections, I shall endeavour to separate what comes under the head of utopianism from what can be classed as criticism of bourgeois society. In other words, I shall extract from the books which directly or indirectly influenced Morris that which deals with the organisation and ways of an ideal society. There again, we shall meet another difficulty. In fact there are, on one hand, innumerable definite suggestions for a future way of life and, on the other, there is a philosophy of history and life upon which the conception of a utopian world is founded. The frontier here is uncertainly traced, but, looking at it



more closely, it is the second element which is decisive. This will be apparent when we consider Ruskin and Marx. That is why, above all as far as these two thinkers are concerned, I thought it best, in the present part of our study, only to tackle the great ideas which bore upon Morris's utopian development, allowing myself to note in passing, as we study the development, similarities of detail.

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Utopian Literature*

### 1. Plato and Campanella

*News from Nowhere* is the end-product (some would not hesitate to say the crowning achievement) of a long speculative literary tradition that has, since Plato, nourished man's dreams. It would appear then, at first sight, that so enquiring and erudite a mind as that of William Morris would be soaked in this mass of material, particularly plentiful in his own country. However, this appear not to have been the case, and a critic, ready to discover in some earlier work the source or inspiration of some detail, some development, some idea, must exercise the greatest caution. Two considerations should encourage us to such caution.

First, it should be agreed that utopia is, to a certain extent, a literary genre with a set form, both in its construction and its essential themes, the narrative element regularly having as its point of departure a journey or a dream, and the ideal society often presenting the same reformist or revolutionary aspects: community of goods, social harmony, obligation to work, elimination of idlers and parasites, absorption of the family into the collective, eugenics, equality, a varying element of enjoyment or asceticism, raising of moral and cultural standards, and so on. Of course, these elements do not have the same value or significance from one work to another: even more than diversity of temperament, historical, political and social pressures give each case a different range and direction. But there is a common traditional basis, which is why the search for sources is seen to be uncertain and forever open to discussion.

In Morris's own case, and this will be our second consideration, in order to avoid really gratuitous hypotheses, I shall be concerned to consider his own evidence or that of contemporaries who knew him. So our field of investigation is, surprisingly, reduced to six names: Plato, Campanella, Thomas More, Samuel Butler, Richard Jefferies and Edward Bellamy. We are sure that he read all these six authors, which by is no means to say that they all exerted an equal influence upon him. Did he read others? We have absolutely no information. I have not found in the whole of his work any definite indication which we can regard as a certain echo of such-and-such a utopian writer, and for my part I am inclined to think that, even if his reading was less restricted, the rest was of little consequence to him. His aggressive contempt for the spirit of the Renaissance and for Puritanism left him indifferent to two centuries of utopia following the publication of the *New Atlantis*. His interest only awakens again with the nineteenth century, in response to several minds whose interests

match his own and whose influence is the greater as his disagreement becomes more violent.

I do not feel there is much to gain by lingering over Plato and Campanella. The only reference to the author of the *Republic* that I have managed to glean from Morris's writings is in the letter of 2 February 1886,<sup>1</sup> in reply to the questionnaire sent out by the *Pall Mall Gazette* to a number of writers about the authors they preferred. The fact that Plato figures in the list (without any comment, incidentally) reveals little. I am quite prepared to believe that it was the *Republic* that Morris had primarily in mind when he put down his name, thus acknowledging his debt to the common fund of utopia to which the Athenian philosopher was one of the first to contribute. Apart from this general consideration, he was undoubtedly responsive to the poetry and elegance, the memory of which was inseparable from that of happy days at Oxford. Having said that, it seems to me that it would be straining a good deal to attribute influence to a work of which the metaphysical idealism is quite foreign to the inclinations of our poet, and the social ideology of which faithfully reflected the structure of slave-owning antiquity, which, as a follower of Ruskin, Morris scorned and rejected.

As far as Campanella is concerned, things are even easier. There again, one single allusion throughout the works, and the name of the Calabrian monk is even missing from the list of favourite authors; one single allusion, clearly and healthily discouraging, from an 1885 lecture, in the course of which Morris sketched the chief features of the sixteenth century:

"But the times were stirring, and gave birth to the most powerful individualities in many branches of literature, and More and Campanella, at least from the midst of the exuberant triumph of young commercialism, gave to the world prophetic hopes of times yet to come when that commercialism itself should have given place to the society which we hope will be the next transform of civilization into something else . . ." <sup>2</sup>

There it is, plain and simple: the socialist of the 'eighties vaguely acknowledges those he considers as predecessors and refers exclusively to the common theme of their utopias: collective ownership of goods. There again, it is too general and abstract a subject for one to talk of inspiration or influence, and, if one troubles to look closer, nothing resembles the London of *News from Nowhere* less than does the City of the Sun, with its theocratic order and its geometries.

## 2. Thomas More

It is quite another matter when we come to Thomas More's *Utopia*. Morris does not refer to that passingly and in general terms. We can even say that it constitutes for him the basic utopian reference book. He goes as far as to say, in the draft of a lecture delivered on 1 October 1885 before the Bloomsbury section of the Socialist League, which I have unearthed in Mr. Chimen Abramsky's collection:

"I do not know of any better description of the new form of Society than that described in More's *Utopia*." <sup>3</sup>



The practice of utopia and growing maturity led Morris to qualify that judgment, but More's work remained for him a basic text and food for thought. As early as 1882 he gave readings from it at Kelmscott and, in a letter of 1 January 1883 (probably to Mrs. Burne-Jones), he saw in the imminent canonisation of the humanist a cause for satisfaction among socialists.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the years of militancy, More remained on a special plane. He is, of course, included in the list of favourite authors.<sup>5</sup> The columns of *Commonweal* are studded with quotations borrowed from *Utopia* and they also contain a study of More written by a certain T. Tonkin.<sup>6</sup> Another of the League's militants, S. M. Ward, devoted a Sunday-evening lecture to him at Hammersmith.<sup>7</sup> For a number of years Morris was tempted, with a somewhat simple enthusiasm, to include the sixteenth-century humanist among the socialist classics and he was astonished to discover in the course of a tour in Scotland that not a single working-class comrade had read him.<sup>8</sup> When, in 1893, he published at the Kelmscott Press a fine edition of *Utopia*, he wrote an important foreword for the occasion, and in it he still affirmed that it "is a necessary part of a Socialist's library".<sup>9</sup> No doubt, having reached this stage in his own development, Morris was no longer content, as we shall see well enough, with this brief judgment, but it must be recognised that he was so content for a long time. The two extracts I have just quoted, from lectures given in 1885, are very significant in this connection, and in *Justice and Socialism*, (the draft of which I publish in an appendix) it is particularly worthy of comment that he takes as a text for his socialist sermon More's condemnation of private property:

"... where every man under certain titles and pretences draweth and plucketh to himself as much as he can, so that a few divide among themselves all the whole riches: be there ever so much abundance and store there to the residue is left lack and poverty . . . no *equal* and *just* distribution of things can be made, nor perfect wealth ever be among men, unless this propriety be exiled and banished."<sup>10</sup>

So More appeared then in Morris's eyes as a socialist before his time, a precursor, "representative of the nobler hopes of his day",<sup>11</sup> just like Robert Owen three centuries later. But, from this stage on his earliest acquaintance with historical materialism led Morris to look more closely at the political rôle played by More, as an opponent of absolute monarchy and especially as a denouncer of the robbery of the peasants by the new men of agrarian capitalism. He could not fail to be impressed by the famous pages of *Utopia* dealing with the enclosures and probably also by the use Marx made of them in his exposition of primitive accumulation.<sup>12</sup> More then became in his eyes, not only the prophet of socialism, but also the witness to the economic and social revolution of the sixteenth century, just like Latimer, with whom Morris liked to link his name. The two martyrs, one Catholic, one Protestant, drew a striking picture of the misery engendered by the dispossession of the freeholders: a process of nascent commercial greed that finds its echo in our times and inspires our struggle for a future free of the scourge of mercantilism.<sup>13</sup>

Such were Morris's first reactions and, if they were still of a rudimentary nature, they contained the germ of the development of his later conclusions.

The second stage, which is clearly the one to claim our attention, came several years later at the time when Morris, writing *News from Nowhere*, incorporated the heritage of More into his own utopia. Our poet's thinking had developed remarkably, and the very fact that he felt a need to give it form does indicate that he no longer believed that there could not be "any better description of the new form of Society than that described in More's *Utopia*".

As Victor Dupont has shown, with great insight,<sup>14</sup> Thomas More's utopia is two-fold. On the one hand, Henry VIII's Chancellor is formulating a set of propositions calculated to raise both the moral standard and the effectiveness of the Tudor exercise of monarchy. That, if one will, is the reformist aspect of his ideology; it was justified by immediate political considerations and it is obvious that Morris's glimpse of the future could draw nothing from this outdated historical context. No less obviously, it is the other aspect, the revolutionary and constructive one, that engaged the thought of our poet, with its description of the institutions and customs of the utopian kingdom. When, in 1885, in his lecture on *Justice and Socialism*, Morris was putting forward More's work as the one model of the society to come, he simply referred his listeners to it,

"... for *all purposes*, whether of Domestic Life, Laws, Learning, Philosophy, Marriage, War and Religion."<sup>15</sup>

On all these points, we observe that, in the end, the conceptions of the two utopists offer as many differences as similarities, and, despite his lasting admiration, one may say that what Morris found in More was less an ideology than a set of problems, constituting a basis for all utopias. It was only in the third stage of his thinking, in 1893, that he defined all that separated him from the humanism of the Renaissance and all the historical reasons he had for being particularly responsive to its way of posing the problems.

The fundamental theme that captivated Morris, was, from the outset, communism. No doubt he had no need to read More to rally to it: reading Marx was amply sufficient, and what was, for a sixteenth-century humanist, an unattainable and more or less unfounded aspiration, became, in *Capital*, the logical culmination of man's material history. Nevertheless, there was, on the theoretical plane, a rigidity of thought which gave More's utopia an extraordinarily original appearance and which foreshadowed Morris's own rigour. If it is true, as Victor Dupont has said, that this utopia is two-fold, it is not ambivalent, and it is surprising that commentators have taken so little account of the poor opinion More had of his own reformism. After enumerating the palliatives which could, "in some measure, lessen the evil", More "utterly denies that it can be wholly taken away":

"By such laws, I say, like as sick bodies that be desperate and past cure be wont with continual good cherishing to be kept and botched up for some time, so these evils also might be lightened and mitigated. But that they may be perfectly cured, and brought to a good and upright state, it is not to be hoped for, whiles every man is master of his own to himself."<sup>16</sup>

Communism appears, in the same passage, as the only remedy for social injustice and as the condition for abundance. More insists upon this last point

over and over again: "though no man have anything, yet every man is rich".<sup>17</sup>

However satisfying these theoretical assertions may have been for Morris, and it is possible that they helped him form his own, it is, above all, their practical applications to utopian behaviour that may have been an influence. This common ownership of goods seems more absolute in More's accounts than in Morris's. Houses in Amaurote are never locked. "Whoso will may go in, for there is nothing within the houses that is private or any man's own. And every tenth year they change their houses by lot."<sup>18</sup> Matters are not pressed so far in *News from Nowhere*, and it is more a state towards which things are moving: as we shall see, the situation described appears as a transition between private ownership of consumer goods and their simple enjoyment.

It is in the economy of distribution that Morris seems to have followed More most faithfully:

"In the midst of every quarter there is a market-place of all manner of things. Thither the works of every family be brought into certain houses, and every kind of thing is laid up in several barns or storehouses. From hence the father of every family or every householder fetcheth whatsoever he and his have need of, and carrieth it away with him without money, without exchange, without any gage, pawn or pledge. For why should anything be denied unto him, seeing there is abundance of all things, and that it is not to be feared lest any man will ask more than he needeth?"<sup>19</sup>

Nothing remains for Morris to do but illustrate by means of lively and picturesque anecdotes the details of this world where money has been abolished. More insists more than once on the absence of any cash token. The peasants of the kingdom of Utopia come and freely provide themselves in the town with everything that is lacking in the countryside.<sup>20</sup> Travellers take no provisions with them: "they lack nothing, for wheresoever they come, they be at home".<sup>21</sup> Goods lacking in one town will be provided by another town which has abundance of them, without there being any accounting or exchanges, and so there are no poor or needy anywhere.<sup>22</sup>

This egalitarian abundance derives from two causes, which Morris, among others, will equally count upon. One is common to all utopias, and we mention it without stressing it: it is the general obligation to work and the abolition of all idleness and parasitism: no more nobility to be maintained with their innumerable followers and mercenaries, no more wretched beggars, no more vagabonds. Thanks to this equitable use of the whole work force, the working day is reduced to six hours.<sup>23</sup> But there is another reason for this abundance, to which Morris certainly paid more heed in that it was directly linked to what was advocated by Ruskin, his first mentor. This reason is the elimination of all unnecessary production. After referring to the multitude who live off the work of others, More exclaims:

"Now consider yourself of these few that do work, how few be occupied in necessary works. For where money beareth all the swing, there many vain and superfluous occupations must needs be used, to serve only for riotous superfluity and dishonest pleasure . . . But if all these that be now busied about unprofitable occupations, with all the whole flock of them that live idly and slothfully, which consume and waste



every one of them more of these things that come by other men's labour than two of the workmen themselves do, if all these (I say) were set to profitable occupations, you easily perceive how little time would be enough, yea, and too much, to store us with all things that may be requisite either for necessity or for commodity, yea, or for pleasure, so that the same pleasure be true and natural."<sup>24</sup>

To vain luxury products for the rich, Morris's condemnation added the cheap rubbish which nineteenth-century capitalist industry was thrusting upon the poor, but, like More, he based the abundance and happiness of the communist age on the satisfaction of reasonable needs and the elimination of all artificiality. However, this "real and natural pleasure" is free in Morris from the tendency to asceticism which marks More's utopia. Precious metals, freed from all monetary significance, are largely used for ornament in *News from Nowhere*, whereas More contemptuously assigns them to the manufacture of slaves' chains and chamber pots.<sup>25</sup> In *Utopia* there is no dustman bedecked in gold: clothing is of monastic simplicity, and of the same colour for everybody.<sup>26</sup> However, the two utopists come together again in respect of the human body. Like Morris, More includes among the most legitimate pleasures those which satisfy natural needs, those of the table as those of procreation. Health is, for him, the supreme good and his Utopians hold beauty, strength and agility in high esteem. Their race is handsome and life is longer there than elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> It is strange that these common conclusions derive from such dissimilar ideologies. What is for one the result of moral and religious meditation is, with the other, the expression of uncompromising materialism and a pagan love of life. This is also the very reason that the similarities and dissimilarities of the organisation of daily life are inextricably linked. If the streets of Amaurote are severe and monotonous, the gardens ranged behind the houses foreshadow, in their beauty and the love with which they are tended,<sup>28</sup> those which will fringe the houses of Hammersmith, on the banks of the Thames, in Morris's urban fantasy. If, on the other hand, the inhabitants of the kingdom of Utopia have their meals in common, they do so by obligation in a monastic order and discipline<sup>29</sup> which contrast with the pleasant freedom of the Guest Houses of twenty-second-century England.

It seems difficult, perhaps pointless, to seek for some particular inspiration for utopian institutions. The elective democracy described by More, hierarchic and authoritarian, has little in common with the final stage of withering-away of the State which we find in *News from Nowhere*. The use of slaves in the utopian system in itself provides one point of fundamental opposition, even if these slaves do not form a social class, since they can redeem themselves and since their children are born free; even if the slavery envisaged by More derives from a progressive ideology since it represents, in contrast with Tudor repressiveness, a humanisation of punishment; even if, in the sixteenth century, such slavery provided the only possible reply to the question of who, in the kingdom of Utopia, would carry out the chores and dirty jobs which Morris hands over to machines. There is scarcely anything other than secondary and fleeting suggestions which might foreshadow Morris's thoughts, and he could quite well have found them elsewhere: a tendency towards the fusing of counties, or ultimate recourse to direct democracy.<sup>30</sup> More worthy of

attention is the idea expressed by More that the abolition of private property, leading to the disappearance of conflicting interests, renders futile the existence of many complex laws and makes recourse to lawyers unnecessary.<sup>31</sup> On this point it even seems that More's text was imprinted on Morris's memory. Finally, we could not end this rapid examination of More's political ideas without recalling his genial and bold concept of the significance of the State, considered for the first time, I believe, as an instrument of domination and exploitation by the ruling class:

"Therefore, when I consider and weigh in my mind all these commonwealths which nowadays anywhere do flourish, so God help me, I can perceive nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth. They invent and devise all means and crafts, first how to keep safely, without fear of losing, that they have unjustly gathered together, and next how to hire and abuse the work and labour of the poor for as little money as may be. These devices, when the rich men have decreed to be kept and observed under colour of the commonalty, that is to say, also of the poor people, then they be made laws."<sup>32</sup>

William Morris had read *Utopia* before reading *Capital* and the *Manifesto*. Perhaps the reading of More made him more receptive to Marx. Perhaps, too, more probably, it seems to me, the assimilation of what was solid argument in Marx allowed him to give full significance to what, in More, was happy intuition.

I do not feel it useful to linger over More's theories about the family, of which his patriarchal and authoritarian conception would scarcely attract Morris, despite a relative tolerance of divorce. At the most one can pick up the point that More does not seem to have given high importance to consanguinity. When a family became too prolific and passed certain numerical norms, the surplus was transferred to other families.<sup>33</sup> In the same way, when a child wanted to learn another trade than that of his father, he had himself adopted into another household where the trade of his choice was carried on.<sup>34</sup> We shall find a memory of this mobility in scattered thoughts by Morris.

We know that, for the latter, the touchstone of any social philosophy was its attitude to work, considered as man's prime need and the condition of his happiness. More's attitude contained nothing to upset him. If it is difficult to speak of inspiration or borrowings, it is at least permissible to say that in this connection Morris found his natural tastes and the bent of his thought reinforced by reading *Utopia*. It is even curious to observe that, in the first part of his account, More, intervening in the discussion with Hythloday, constitutes himself devil's advocate and doubts whether one would feel impelled to work under a communist régime. His question remains practically unanswered in the course of the rambling conversation,<sup>35</sup> and it is in *News from Nowhere* that a long chapter replies to it. But if Hythloday is evasive at that moment in the dialogue, he formulates an indirect answer in his description of utopian customs, which Morris was to develop in a systematic way. In fact, More is already insisting upon the need to diversify occupation. Each young Utopian learns, as well as agriculture, one or several trades, notably weaving, building, the art of the smithy or of carpentry, and has the right to be employed as he

chooses.<sup>36</sup> Town dwellers go in rotation to till the fields for two years and find such pleasure in it that some of them obtain permission to work there longer. At harvest time, they are mobilised and go to reinforce the teams already on the spot,<sup>37</sup> just as Dick and his friends will go up the Thames to help with the haymaking. Similarly, they turn out in crowds to mend the roads,<sup>38</sup> and perhaps we should see in this the origin of the episode which enlivens the carriage journey from Hammersmith to Bloomsbury. There stands out, then, in *Utopia*, a firm belief in the dignity of manual labour, as R. W. Chambers rightly points out,<sup>39</sup> seeing its most significant manifestation in the fact that the magistrates, although they are excused from it, take part to set an example.<sup>40</sup> Although this belief is just as emphatically expressed by Morris, there is, nevertheless, a perceptible difference between the two utopias. For More, work remains an austere obligation, and the whole organisation of his utopian world tends to reduce it as far as possible, "that all the citizens should withdraw from the bodily service to the free liberty of the mind and garnishing of the same. For herein they suppose the felicity of life to consist".<sup>41</sup> So the Catholic More was not entirely emancipated from the theological concept of the original curse. Only with Morris is the gospel of joy in work preached, work as its own reward, abolishing the distinction between work and leisure.

To become clear about what brought him near to More and what separated them, Morris needed to write his own utopia. He needed also, in the light of Marxism, to be able to define his position with regard to More in a clear historical perspective. He had reached this level of maturity when, in 1893, he wrote his introduction to the splendid Kelmscott Press edition of *Utopia*.<sup>42</sup> He observes, first of all, that it is thanks to the current upsurge of socialism that More's work has ceased to be regarded as a "charming literary exercise". This "great event of the end of the century has thrown a fresh light upon the book; so that now to some it seems not so much a regret for days which might have been, as (in its essence) a prediction of a state of society which will be".<sup>43</sup>

But we must beware of hasty comparisons. Certainly, the common enemy of the socialists of the nineteenth century and of the Renaissance thinker was the capitalist bourgeoisie. But whereas modern revolutionaries attack it as it draws near to its final stage, and when an industrial proletariat capable of overturning it has come into being, More was "the man who resisted what has seemed to most the progressive movement of his own time", and he did so by carrying on a rearguard action, in favour of "the surviving Communism of the Middle Ages (become hopeless in More's time, and doomed to be soon wholly effaced by the advancing wave of Commercial Bureaucracy)". Morris insists upon

"what was yet alive in him of mediaeval Communist tradition, the spirit of association, which among other things produced the Guilds, and which was strong in the Mediaeval Catholic Church itself".

It is apposite to remark that More's text fully justifies this interpretation. The chapter in which Hythloday relates how he converted the Utopians to Christianity and gives the reasons for his success, is particularly suggestive:

"Howbeit, I think this was no small help and furtherance in the matter, that they heard us say that Christ instituted among his, all things com-



mon, and that the same community doth yet remain amongst the rightest Christian companies.”<sup>44</sup>

Such an observation, from More’s pen, amounts to a bitter comment on the new ways and is a declaration of backward-looking nostalgia. So it is not surprising that Morris writes:

“In fact I think More must be looked upon rather as the last of the old than the first of the new.”

This judgment throws a sharp light on Morris’s mediaevalism: he did not hide his affection for the pre-capitalist tradition and made it the historical reference point of his utopia, but he was careful not to become its captive. He defines its limits and transcends it, in a remarkable dialectical effort. The conceptual starting-point for taking up More’s mediaeval heritage and raising it to a higher level is

“... the longing for ... a society in which the individual man can scarcely conceive of his existence apart from the Commonwealth of which he forms a portion”.

Thus will be rediscovered, on a new plane, the vast organic unity of the mediaeval world which Sir Thomas More hopelessly defended against the combined assaults of mercantile individualism and aggressive nationalism.

This does not at all mean that Morris blindly and purposefully ignores More’s humanism and the post-mediaeval content of his ideology, but he is able to pick out the essence and has a sure feeling that the acquisition of the classic heritage, far from producing a revolutionary contradiction, is, in More, the revelation of an evangelical and harmonious conception of the Christian ideal:

“Moreover the spirit of the Renaissance, itself the intellectual side of the very movement he strove against, was strong in him and doubtless helped to create his Utopia, by means of the contrast which it put before his eyes of the ideal free nations of the ancients, and the sordid welter of the struggle for power in the days of dying feudalism, of which he himself was a witness. This Renaissance enthusiasm has supplanted in him the chivalry feeling of the age just passing away. To him war is no longer a delight of the well born, but rather an ugly necessity, to be carried on, if so it must be, by ugly means. Hunting and hawking are no longer the choice pleasures of Knight and Lady, but are jeered at by him as foolish and unreasonable pieces of butchery: his pleasures are in the main the reasonable ones of learning and music. With all this, his imaginations of the past he must needs read into his ideal vision, together with his own experiences of his time and people. Not only are there bondslaves and a king, and priests almost adored, and cruel punishments for the breach of the marriage contract, in that happy island, but there is throughout an atmosphere of asceticism, which has a curiously blended savour of Cato the Censor and a medieval monk.”<sup>45</sup>

So, at one and the same time, adds Morris, one finds in More “the man instinctively sympathetic with the Communistic side of Mediaeval society” and

"the enthusiast of the Renaissance, ever looking toward his idealised ancient society as the type and example of all really intelligent human life".

Such is this utopianism, product of a dual tradition, which, in his 1893 analysis, Morris extracts from More's work. This work continued to fill him with admiration. He drew his theme and setting from it, as well as the idea for more than one definite detail. But this ideal could no longer bring him the same complete satisfaction as in 1885. This picture of the new society, he writes, is "his own indeed, not ours", and these words constitute the real conclusion of his preface. After three centuries that had seen a remarkable raising of the level of productive forces and a profound transformation of productive relationships, looking ahead could no longer have the same character. What, for More, had been a vain hope, for Morris became a possibility, and that was the essential difference from which others stemmed. The road to the future, for Morris, was proletarian and revolutionary. More's utopia could only be the act of a prince, a charter granted. "For from the prince," he wrote, "as from a perpetual well-spring, cometh among the people the flood of all that is good or evil."<sup>46</sup> It is King Utopus, whose name the imaginary island bears, who

"also brought the rude and wild people to the excellent perfection in all good fashions, humanity and civil gentleness, wherein they now go beyond all the people of the world",<sup>47</sup>

and it is he who drew up the plans and institutions of Amaurote.<sup>48</sup> This explains the hierarchic and autocratic order which ruled the smallest details of the daily lives of the Utopians and which is as foreign to Morris's communism as is the domination by an intellectual aristocracy instituted by More.<sup>49</sup> This also explains the mistrust of the people which led R. W. Chambers to say that More was to be reckoned among "the greatest of our reforming conservatives",<sup>50</sup> a mistrust which gave him a lifelong hatred of Lutheranism, in which he saw the ferment of peasant rebellion, a mistrust to which, in that same year 1893, Morris drew attention in his manual of socialism:

"... throughout modern history, there has been in all democratic fermentations a discrepancy, indeed often an instinctive antipathy, between the theoretical movement, as conceived of by thinkers, and the actual popular or working-class struggle. The latter intent on immediate advantages, and unconscious of any ideal; the former full of the ideal which they have grasped intuitively from the first, but finding the necessary steps towards it so repulsive to them, that they are incapable of taking action. Sir Thomas More, for example, who imagined a society free from the evils of privileged commercialism, which was first raising its head in his time, had no sympathy with the western rebels in England or with the Peasant War in Germany."<sup>51</sup>

Only the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, bringing in its wake the conscious organisation of the working class, could enable scientific socialism to resolve this contradiction and to open up the prospect of a decisive social transformation: Marxism directed history towards the fertilisation of the workers' movement by theory and the enrichment of theory by the workers' experience. Carried along by this tide, William Morris, if, like More, he remained faithful to certain human values which had been destroyed by capitalism,

while divesting them of their theological covering, projected them forward, not out of time, but into a future whose chronology he had already worked out, a future in which those values, not simply reproduced, but transformed, would express the flowering of a humanity which had reached the supreme stage of its logical development. This development would not be the act of a prince, but the work of men themselves, aware of the laws of history and having learned, through their knowledge of these laws, to become masters of their destiny.

### 3. Samuel Butler

Nothing could be less surprising than the fact of Morris's having naturally turned to More throughout his thinking about utopia, and obviously it was appropriate to define the extent of this influence, while indicating its exact limits. However, it seems to me that there is no need to linger so long over that which Samuel Butler may have had. Various critics have felt it necessary to establish likenesses between *Erewhon* and *News from Nowhere*: they have done it somewhat general terms and we need perhaps to look a little more closely.

One fact is certain: Morris showed great admiration for Butler's story, and even read it aloud to his friend Burne-Jones.<sup>52</sup> His daughter May tells us that references to *Erewhon* were conversational small change in the family circle.<sup>53</sup> We note, though, that it did not figure in Morris's list of favourite books: one may wonder about this omission without giving it too much importance.

Let us come to the point without more delay. The problem before us is threefold, because we must give attention to three aspects of the work: its moral as a fable, its satire and its utopia. On the first point I shall have little to say. The narrative thread of *News from Nowhere* has nothing in common with that of *Erewhon* and even represents a complete break. While Morris figures among the initiators of the novel about the future, Butler, as A. L. Morton correctly observes, is one of the last authors of the geographical utopias.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, there can be no doubt that our author must have been enamoured of the first fifty pages of the book. The description of Higg's adventurous expedition, over almost impassible peaks and a dreadful landscape, is a great literary achievement, and the sense of nature which inspires it, its mixture of precise suggestion and romanticism, could not but please him. If we find none of the same type of narrative in *News from Nowhere* we can certainly find similar narratives in the majority of the "late prose romances", and it is not impossible that echoes of *Erewhon* may be mingled with memories of the countryside of Iceland.

On the second point, I am bound to the same brevity by the very nature of the present work. My purpose is to analyse the constructive aspect of Morris's utopia without lingering over the negative or satirical counterpoint which is an inevitable aspect of every utopia. On this occasion it is certainly a pity, because it is clear that Morris's admiration and enthusiasm were aroused by the case against Victorian hypocrisy which is the main theme of *Erewhon*. Although he refrained from any direct attack against religion, Morris must have revelled in the reading of the sparkling chapter about musical banks. He showed less reserve in his criticism of the family and perhaps he echoed (though with much more human warmth) Butler's bitter diatribes. He joined hands with the latter in his denunciation of the universities and, more generally, of the educational



system. Perhaps it is here that a definite influence can be detected. And what is there to say about the cruel description of the cult of Ydgrun (Mrs. Grundy), something for which Morris had an equal hatred? However, a profound difference separates the two men. In our poet, this hatred is implacable, steadfast and quite uncompromising, but one cannot say the same about the author of *Erewhon*. After having branded the followers of Ydgrun, is it not true that, petit-bourgeois as he was all his life, he went so far as to declare openly that their hypocrisy is a necessary evil which, in the end, assures the happiness of mankind.<sup>55</sup> Should we not see here the reason for Morris's reticence, already mentioned? In a more general sense, was he not somewhat put off by this ambiguity, this ambivalence even, which characterises Butler's approach?<sup>56</sup>

It is extremely difficult, in *Erewhon*, to disentangle utopia from satire. Some critics tend to stress the utopian side of the book by giving utopia a definition which seems to me to be exaggeratedly wide.<sup>57</sup> Others, the majority, rank it with the philosophical tales which, in the Swift tradition, have no other purpose than to exercise a caustic wit against institutions and manners. Butler, despite his sly harking back to social conformity, draws his contemporaries with vitriol, but does he propose a better social order? This barely concealed conformity clearly prevents this, and the only glimpses of something more or less positive come from the workings of a logic at once peremptory and ponderous, reinforced by a love of paradox. Such is the appearance of the theory of machines, which seems to be just a pseudo-scientific joke, since Butler immediately sets up against it a counter-theory, (which in political terms might be called a 'minority report') containing the germ of that teleological vitalism which was to characterise the writer's approaching and final break with Darwinism. Morris could not have failed to react to this picture of humanity destroying machines for fear of their acquiring consciousness by a process of biological evolution, and enslaving mankind. His Londoners of the twenty-second century similarly rid their world of mechanical clutter, but one must stress that their motives were totally different. Despite the legend, Morris never rejected the use of machines or the development of energy sources, and it is on this very development and the immense leisure so produced that he based the possibility of artistic and craft activity capable of giving back to man joy in his work, natural ease of life and the secret of happiness. We may add that Butler's hazardous speculations had little chance of intriguing Morris, and that paradox has no place whatever in his utopian thought, which was ever eager to get its roots into a materialistic science based upon the real world and the laws of history. The only point upon which the two story-tellers are at one, when all is weighed up, is in the denunciation of a mechanical civilisation in which man becomes nothing but an adjunct to the machine. All the same, it would be too strong to talk of definite influence. The theme runs through nineteenth-century literature and Butler's use of it only caught Morris's attention to the extent that he found it a variant of Ruskin's ideology.<sup>58</sup>

There is, then, an element of utopia in *Erewhon*,<sup>59</sup> and its expression sometimes takes on disconcerting aspects precisely because the dividing line between utopia and satire is ill-defined. Indeed, is there not a contradiction between the gloomy moral picture Butler paints and the extraordinary physical beauty of the people of *Erewhon*, which foreshadows that of Morris's humanity to come? E. P. Thompson does not hesitate to regard this as direct

borrowing.<sup>60</sup> Without wanting to deny all value to this assertion, I would like to point out that every utopian people is of necessity beautiful, and also that this beauty is very differently explained by Butler and by Morris. For the latter it is the fruit of a social revolution which permits the free flowering of the individual, whereas for the former it is the implicit consequence of a satirical paradox: the Erewhonians, in fact, consider that it is immoral to be ill and punish the crime severely. More interesting, from our standpoint, is the other aspect of the paradox, namely that in *Erewhon* what we call crime is considered an illness and treated as such. If, in Morris's humanist ethic, the treatment is very different, the idea is certainly the same, and one cannot in this case reject *a priori* the possibility of inspiration.<sup>61</sup>

Another trait common to the humanity of *Erewhon* and that of *News from Nowhere* is the natural politeness and gentleness shown by the inhabitants. But there again the motivation is totally different. Although Butler does not say so (and the ambivalence to which I have referred is shown in this silence) we are obliged to suppose that these qualities are pure hypocrisy, necessary hypocrisy, but also that they might be spontaneous in the ideal humanity after which Butler's morality secretly hankers. Morris's explanation, on the contrary, is without any psychological or ethical idealism: the transformation of human relationships results from the abolition of the antagonisms aroused by private property. So, however numerous the resemblances undeniably are between the two works, they remain illusory. *Erewhon* is a moral satire whose bitterness leads only to conservative conclusions: as J. B. Fort justly writes: Butler "remains to his dying day pretty well a stranger" to the social question.<sup>62</sup> This is at the very heart of Morris's work, and his conception of man is materialist and revolutionary.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4. Richard Jefferies

On his return from a propaganda tour of Scotland in April 1885, William Morris spent a day or two with Edward Carpenter, at Millthorpe, and from there he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones:

"I read a queer book called *After London* coming down: I rather liked it: absurd hopes curled round my heart as I read it."<sup>64</sup>

The book had just appeared, and seems to have fascinated Morris. Carpenter, in his memoirs, writes: "I remember him arriving from the train with Jefferies' book *After London* in his hands – which had just come out. The book delighted him with its prophecy of an utterly ruined and deserted London . . . And he read page after page of it to us with glee that evening as we sat round the fire".<sup>65</sup> This enthusiasm was in no way passing: Mackail records: "*After London*, the unfinished masterpiece of Richard Jefferies, was a book that Morris afterwards was never weary of praising. It put into definite shape, with a mingling of elusive romance and minute detail that was entirely after his heart, much that he had himself imagined; and he thought that it represented very closely what might really happen in a dispeopled England".<sup>66</sup>

From 1877, in fact (and I shall have occasion to return at greater length to this point),<sup>67</sup> Morris's utopian aspiration took the form of an alternative:

inspired by a profound hatred of industrial and commercial "civilisation", he longed for its destruction by revolutionary overthrow and considered that, if this did not happen, only an inevitable return to barbarism could offer mankind an acceptable solution. Being by nature an optimist and readily persuaded to take sides, he inevitably made the first part of the alternative the main theme of his political and utopian message, but there is room to assert that the second part did not cease, because of that, to linger in his thoughts. An even more striking fact, as we shall see, was that such a return to barbarism did not strike him as in any way a horrible or desperate prospect. While it is true that he thought about it more readily during phases of depression, it did not negate his optimism at all, for he saw therein a possibility of human regeneration. His historical thinking about the Middle Ages and later, about gentile society, led him into a certain idealisation of the barbarian ages, particularly in the prose romances of his later years. We shall see that, in the last stage, Morris's utopian thought culminated in a dialectical synthesis of the two parts of the alternative.

In 1885, this alternative still presented itself in its contradictory form. The extraordinary naturalism of Jefferies overwhelmed him, because his own plastic genius inclined him to prefer speculation embedded in fiction rather than as an abstraction; Jefferies had a feeling so close to his own for the life of plants, animals, and the earth, as well as respect for human dignity. The relationship between the two temperaments is quite striking. Jefferies' catastrophic, mediaeval utopia, had the note, with scarcely less poetry, of Morris's romantic stories. Our poet must have found himself oddly at ease and marvelling to find the embodiment of some of his own dreams. A study of *After London* is much more than the study of an influence or a source; it is, in fact, an examination of an extreme form of an important aspect of Morris's utopia; it is picking up a book he might almost have written and which probably freed him from an obsession.

The titles of the two parts of the narrative: "The Relapse into Barbarism" and "Wild England", are distinctly suggestive and must have induced Morris to begin reading. The starting point of the story is an unexplained cataclysm which suddenly ravaged England. Following the passing of a mysterious heavenly body, the levels of earth and sea were abruptly changed, resulting in the destruction of cities and the annihilation of almost all the population. With a certain humour cloaking his critical intention, Jefferies says: "And those whose business is theology have pointed out that the wickedness of those times surpassed understanding, and that a change and sweeping away of the human evil that had accumulated was necessary, and was effected by supernatural means. The relation of this must be left to them, since it is not the province of the philosopher to meddle with such matters."<sup>68</sup> We may note that this passage is the only one in the book containing a reference to religion, and its negative character echoes Morris's own rejection.

With hallucinatory realism, Jefferies describes depopulated England invaded by exuberant vegetation. Pastures and ploughland become covered with thistles, sorrel, couch grass, nettles, gillieflowers and a thousand other weeds. Brambles and thorn bushes spread impenetrable tangles and efface all traces of roads. The survivors have no choice but to follow animal tracks or hack themselves a passage. After thirty years, England is all forest and marshland.



Mice and rats swarm. Formerly domestic animals, dogs, cats, cattle, pigs, sheep, horses return to their wild state.<sup>69</sup>

The description of the former site of London is especially impressive. The ruins are buried in a pestilential swamp where there is nothing but decay, fever-laden miasmas, choking phosphorescent mists, where the stagnant water, penetrating deeper and deeper into the ground, brings up as foul gases the contents of millenary sewers replete with the excreta of hundreds of millions of human beings. In this vast accursed region no life can exist,<sup>70</sup> and nobody dreams of venturing there. In some spots the ground seems to be burning, giving off sulphurous fumes from the combustion of chemical products accumulated by the men of former times.<sup>71</sup> The hero of the story, having reached the place thanks to a storm which has temporarily dispersed the deadly vapours, moves about there in a nightmare atmosphere and is only saved by flight. This frightful symbolic vision must have filled Morris with vengeful satisfaction.

The geography of the country has been upset. Obstructions and changes in the level of the ground deflected the course of rivers. Enormous masses of water gathered in the middle of England, forming a great lake, dotted with contorted uninhabited islands, and also providing great sheets of water of incomparable beauty.<sup>72</sup> On this lake the adventures of the young hero Felix Aquila are unfolded, and there seems to be no doubt that there Morris found the setting and the inspiration for *The Water of The Wondrous Isles*. It is also very probable, in this story as in several others, that Morris recalled *After London* in his descriptions of fearful forests. Finally the theme of the hero leaving his family to seek adventure and gain glory is common to Jefferies and to Morris, but there is nothing particularly original in the theme, and it would be going too far to claim to discern any influence.

When the cataclysm happened, the "upper classes", custodians of culture and civilisation, managed, thanks to their money, to leave England, but no one knows what became of them, for it seems that there were similar disasters on the continent. The only survivors were ignorant and uncouth, and former mechanical inventions (railways, telephones, aeronautical machines) left no trace beyond a mysterious legend.<sup>73</sup>

Those who escaped, dispersed across the countryside, reverted to the most primitive conditions, living at first by hunting and re-establishing the cultivation of scattered bits of land wrested from the brambles. Little by little, villages were formed, then small and separate little kingdoms.<sup>74</sup> On the fringe of this working population another race dwelt in the forests: on the one hand Bushmen, dreadful savage bands living by plunder, and on the other, the Romanies or Zingaris, tribes of gypsies exactly like their ancestors, living in a matriarchal society.<sup>75</sup> The sinister threat of these cruel and savage men added to the difficulties which burdened the rural communities, which were also menaced by continual invasions of Welsh, Irish and Scots, bent upon taking revenge upon the descendants of their erstwhile oppressors.<sup>76</sup>

The régime of these feudal communities was based upon slavery and the constant fear of being reduced to slavery. The number of slaves, ten times greater than that of freemen, and the savage squabbles between local chieftains, demanded an enormous military machine.<sup>77</sup> Everywhere reigned insecurity, terror, despotism, cruelty, contempt for human life. Felix Aquila, whose

morality is strangely superior to that of his contemporaries, waxes indignant, seeing how tyrants never lack executioners to carry out their base deeds,<sup>78</sup> providing an echo in advance of the indignation of the men of Nowhere at the memory of the misdeeds of their Victorian ancestors. Without expressing such advanced views, he is nevertheless led by circumstances to revise the prejudices nourished by his caste education. He can see that the king is a commonplace man, owing his throne to the chance of birth and not to any superiority.<sup>79</sup> Sheltered and fed in the course of his misadventures by a disabled yokel, he is shocked to discover that his host is a slave and decides after heart-searching to shake his hand, nevertheless.<sup>80</sup> Joining an army in a lowly rank, he lives the life of the common soldiers and, through their astonishing remarks, is brought to see with other eyes the society in which he lives.<sup>81</sup> He is very surprised to discover that these men, illiterate and uncultured as they are, are capable of expressing opinions on public affairs and of understanding the motives which govern men's behaviour.<sup>82</sup> Much more – and one can easily imagine the interest with which Morris must have read these lines – Felix discovers that the manual skills of which he is so proud amount to little, and that the only masters of their crafts are the lowly artisans.<sup>83</sup> So, in the very bosom of the most brutish and cruel of barbarians, true human values appear, leading to a hope for a better future than in the lost days of "civilisation".

It is a curious premise that the nobles of the new age are descended from men who, alone in the midst of an ignorant mass, could still read and write, and who endeavoured to maintain this privilege, jealously preserving the few manuscripts.<sup>84</sup> But the taste for culture has been lost, books are rare and nobody wants them, and education is not esteemed.<sup>85</sup> Science and the techniques of railways and flying machines arouse no interest or research. On the other hand, men have kept the memory of the great legends of Greek and Latin antiquity,<sup>86</sup> and during a festival we are presented with a production of Sophocles' *Antigone*, carefully transcribed by successive copyists.<sup>87</sup> One cannot help thinking of old Hammond's remarks about the world's new youth during the meal at the Bloomsbury Guest House. But Jefferies finds an explanation for this unexpected taste for Greek tragedy which is not without depth and which Marx would not have disavowed:

"In some indefinable manner the spirit of the ancient Greeks seemed to her" (referring to Aurora, Felix's fiancée, who plays the part of Antigone) "in accord with the times, for men had, or appeared to have, so little control over their own lives that they might well imagine themselves overruled by destiny."<sup>88</sup>

By the force of events, and apart from the courts of princes, life has become simple again, and Jefferies finds great charm in it. He describes it with the same healthy realism and gentle lyricism that we find again in William Morris. In Aquila's house in the country, a relic of the past like the old house in *News from Nowhere*, which it resembles in more than one respect, the Prince's ridiculous messenger is quite baffled: "Though interested, in spite of himself, Lord John, acknowledging the flowers, turned to go with a sense of relief. The simplicity of manners seemed discordant to him. He felt out of place, and in some way lowered in his own esteem, and yet he despised the rural retirement



and beauty about him."<sup>89</sup> The garden, lovingly cultivated by Baron Aquila, is described with the same tenderness and in almost the same terms as Morris uses in his descriptions.<sup>90</sup> We find the same taste for rural styles of building and roofs.<sup>91</sup> The men of the new age like spacious rooms and need elbow-room, like the inhabitants of Nowhere.<sup>92</sup> The interior is decorated and furnished in accordance with Morris's own preferences: "The bed itself was very low, framed of wood, thick and solid . . . There was no carpet, nor any substitute for it: the walls were whitewashed; ceiling there was none: the worm-eaten rafters were visible, and the roof-tree. But on the table was a large earthenware bowl, full of meadow orchids, bluebells and a bunch of may in flower".<sup>93</sup> Felix and his brother Oliver make the furniture for the rooms in which they live with their own hands, and the latter carves it tastefully.<sup>94</sup> Felix's art is certainly more rudimentary, but the solid oak chest in which he keeps his manuscripts would probably not have displeased Morris.<sup>95</sup> Even the coarse window glass recalls his disdain for the too-perfect glass of commerce.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, in Jefferies' eyes, the return to barbarism contains the seeds of a fresh blossoming for mankind. But the author of *After London* is none the less aware, as we have seen, of the moral degradation introduced by this slave society, giving free rein to the most brutal instincts, and his utopianism is not satisfied. This explains the meeting of Felix with the Shepherd people, who live in idyllic equality,<sup>97</sup> and who shower the most generous hospitality upon their guest. Felix anticipates the gesture of William Guest at Hammersmith: "Having nothing else to give them, he took from his pocket one of the gold coins he had brought from the site of the ancient city, and offered it. They laughed and made him understand that it was of no value to them; but they passed it from hand to hand, and he noticed that they began to look at him curiously."<sup>98</sup> But they are impressed by the young man's knowledge and skills and rapidly show great respect for him. He helps them to defend themselves against the Romanies, teaches them how to build fortifications, and their gratitude is so great that they invite him to reign over them, and do not wish to let him leave. But Felix wants to be back with his fiancée Aurora and flees through the forest to rejoin her. The story ends abruptly here but, although unfinished, it by no means excludes the possibility of the young man's return to the Shepherds in company with Aurora.

This brief final episode certainly did not leave William Morris unmoved. The Shepherds of *After London* are the very brethren of the Innocent Folk of *The Well at the World's End* and of those primitive people from whom the heroes of *The Wood Beyond the World* escape and towards whom they return. Does not the development of Jefferies' story foreshadow the long evolution of Morris, plunging further and further into the past in his quest for the pure virtues of pre-capitalist ages, attracted, after the Middle Ages for which he maintains his enthusiasm, by the barbarian epic of the Nordic or Germanic tribes, or the romantic world of an almost timeless pre-mediaevalism?

Perhaps A. L. Morton is too severe in judging that Jefferies depicts the roughness of barbarism as without hope, and the poverty of the Middle Ages as without vitality.<sup>99</sup> It seems excessive to me to see *After London* as a pessimistic utopia,<sup>100</sup> and Morris's enthusiasm for this book is an indication that he did not look upon it as such. It certainly helped him to give form and substance to the alternative of "barbarism or socialism" which haunted his



thoughts. It encouraged him to impregnate them both with his belief in man before projecting them into the future in a harmonious dialectical synthesis. The "absurd hopes" which "curled round the heart" of Morris as he read the book were not a reaction, but direct inspiration.

### 5. Edward Bellamy

If his enthusiastic reading of *After London* in 1885 freed Morris from the tendency to dwell, as it were nostalgically, on imagined cataclysms, he was provoked to an opposite reaction by reading *Looking Backward*, the utopia of the American Edward Bellamy. Its success of 1888 in the United States soon spread to Britain, thanks to an English edition in 1889. Morris wrote to Bruce Glasier on 13 May:

"I suppose you have seen or read, or at least tried to read, *Looking Backward*. I had to on Saturday, having promised to lecture on it. Thank you, I wouldn't care to live in such a cockney paradise as he imagines."<sup>101</sup>

Remember Morris's stubborn refusal ever to read any book which he knew intuitively would displease him. There had to be serious reasons for him to break this habit. The success of this utopian novel, already considerable in the first year (ten thousand copies sold), suddenly became enormous and by the end of the second year reached a sale of three hundred thousand copies in the United States alone, a figure which in subsequent years reached the half-million, passing the record figure set up by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>102</sup> The same craze swept England and seems to have been particularly marked in political circles close to Morris. "Many socialist friends", recounts his daughter May, "were accepting Bellamy's conception of the Ideal State, some with satisfaction, others with resignation".<sup>103</sup> This conception acquired the status of doctrine. Just as in the United States it formed the basis for the constitution of a real party (the "nationalist" movement, as it was called) so, in England, there was created an ephemeral society for the nationalisation of work, intended to "put into effect the principles of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*", and it founded a no less ephemeral journal, *Nationalisation News*: this society seems to have set up at least seven sections.<sup>104</sup>

It is probable that, if the vogue and influence of Bellamy were less extensive and less deep in Britain than in America, part of the reason was the stand made by Morris, and not only this stand, which only affected a limited circle, but still more the publication of *News from Nowhere*, which was its direct result. No text (if ever one was written) has survived of the public talk Morris gave on 12 May 1889 in Hammersmith. But the point of view he expressed on that evening is known to us through an article devoted to *Looking Backward* in the columns of *Commonweal* six weeks later: this simple fact shows the prolonged violence of Morris's reaction and the importance he gave to Bellamy's book.<sup>105</sup>

This latter is too well-known for me to make a detailed analysis of it; we can confine ourselves for the moment to recalling its essential themes, which I shall come back to, moreover, by way of Morris's reflections. The utopian story-line is commonplace enough, despite certain details intended to be startling. Julian West, the hero of the tale, is a young and wealthy Boston bourgeois, very reactionary in his views and very much annoyed by a building strike which delays

his marriage to a young woman of his circle, Edith Bartlett. A sufferer from insomnia, he sleeps, without anyone knowing, in an underground chamber attached to his house where a specialist "mesmerises" him to induce sleep. One night in 1887, a fire destroys his home and he is assumed to have perished in the flames. But, protected by the thick walls of his unsuspected shelter, he continues in his cataleptic sleep until the year 2000. Then, during building operations, he happens to be discovered by an old doctor, named Leete, who arouses him and introduces him to the novelties of a socially transformed world. The doctor has a daughter, also named Edith, who turns out to be a descendant of his lost fiancée and who falls in love with Julian, whose photograph she already possessed. A conventional enough idyll ensues and reaches a happy conclusion. Its trifling vicissitudes at more or less regular intervals lighten the dreariness of long theoretical dialogues and monologues in the course of which Julian has the workings of the new society explained to him. It is in fact a very strongly hierarchical and disciplined society, in which the State owns all the means of production and distribution. This situation came about gradually and peaceably in the early years of the twentieth century: the progressive concentration of big trusts culminated in the formation of a single trust which became the State. Workers were mobilised into an industrial army from the age of 21 to the age of 45 and enjoyed a long retirement. Mechanisation had developed and eased the burden upon men. Money had disappeared and products were distributed equally to all by means of deductions on an annual credit card.

The story-structure itself did not appeal to Morris. In fact, he considered it so detestable that he could only account for the success of the novel by reference to the growing interest in socialist ideology among his contemporaries:

"It seems clear to me from the reception which Mr. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* has received that there are a great many people who are turning hopefully to Socialism. I am sure that ten years ago it would have been very little noticed if at all: whereas now several editions have been sold in America, and it is attracting general attention in England. To anyone not deeply interested in the social question it could not be at all an attractive book. It is true that it is cast in the form of a romance, but the author states very frankly in his preface that he has only given it this form as a sugar-coating to the pill,<sup>106</sup> and the device of making a man wake up in a new world has grown so common, and has been done with so much more care and art than Mr. Bellamy has used, that by itself this would have done little for it; it is the serious essay and not the slight envelope of romance which people have found interesting to them."<sup>107</sup>

The judgment is severe; it is even somewhat unjust. No doubt the utopian procedure of awakening in another world is handled by Bellamy with a wealth of pseudo-scientific detail that produces a feeling of oppressive heaviness. But Morris himself had had recourse to the fiction of a dream in *A Dream of John Ball* and would again in *News from Nowhere*. It is true that he does so, if not with such great care, with infinitely more art, and his fervour allows him with impunity to convince us that it is not a dream but a vision. However, to deny Bellamy's book all artistic merit is too much and no doubt stems from a stub-

born ideological rancour. Certainly clumsiness abounds, and Victor Dupont, in his thesis on the utopian novel, has made a penetrating list. The general structure of the book is unattractive:

"Of 28 chapters, 5 are essentially literary, 7 are of pure sociological discussion, 5 are tables illustrating social theories, 11 filled with didactic dialogues or monologues, linked with the rest by all-too-obviously artificial introductions."<sup>108</sup>

In the plot itself, explanatory coincidences pile up ponderously. More irritating, the characters – very few, (at most three), who represent the new mankind, only appear in their conversations with Julian West. We know nothing whatever of their separate existence, and their comprehension of the nineteenth century is such that no aspect of their psychology is truly revealing. They are hardly individualised and lack all depth. As Victor Dupont justly observes:

"The physical appearance of the doctor and his wife remain unknown to us; and we cannot *feel* their daughter's charm."<sup>109</sup>

Old Hammond, so lively and so visible, who, in *News from Nowhere*, fulfils the same didactic function as the colourless Dr. Leete, slips less readily from the memory. Something even more serious: Julian West is literally confined to the doctor's house and has no direct contact with the utopian world, which we know only through abstract descriptions. William Morris's Visitor, on the contrary, lives with extraordinary intensity, from the first moment to the end of the dream, in a reborn England with a countryside and inhabitants quivering with life.

All this is true, but there are in *Looking Backward*, nevertheless, some remarkable pages, so remarkable even that Morris's memory (which it would be difficult to describe as unconscious or subconscious) has recorded them without argument. In particular those which record the pathetic anguish of Julian West, finding himself in an unknown world, anguish bordering upon nausea and increased by the feeling of loss of identity and mental balance.<sup>110</sup> It really seems that Bellamy has here introduced to utopian literature an original and very human element. Similar feelings, in a less dramatic, more vague, possibly more engaging form, are expressed by the Visitor in *News from Nowhere*, chilled and aged by the warmth and youth of the new humanity and, at the same time, forever trembling lest the vision fade away. There is also, as in Morris's utopia, the continual contrast between the old and the new which, without reaching the emotive quality of the counterpoint achieved by the poet, is not without its effect: in both stories the present is continuously exposed to the judgment of the future. Similarly, one could, though on a trivial level, pick out minor direct borrowings on the part of Morris, such as the conversation over a bottle of wine between old Hammond and the Visitor at the end of the meal, when the others have left, just like that which Bellamy describes between Dr. Leete and Julian.

But there is much more, and Morris's unfairness is only equalled by his anticipatory ingratitude! Edward Bellamy is the first Anglo-Saxon utopist, ahead of Morris, to abandon the exploration of *terrae incognitae* in order to build



in his own country, and to put the time dimension in the place of geographical distance. With both of them, this new and original form comes from the urgent doctrinal concern to prove to contemporaries and compatriots that socialism is possible; but, at the same time, the need to convince gives each utopia a definite national quality which in itself has artistic validity. The Boston of the year 2000 is the result of typically American economic and cultural factors just as the England of the twenty-second century stays familiarly English. Morris wanted to write an anti-Bellamy utopia, and could not resist tinging his theoretical disagreement with anti-Americanism.<sup>111</sup> But in taking his stand against Bellamy he was inevitably obliged to borrow from his opponent his very concept of utopia in all that was newest and most fundamental. Morris's debt is immense, and since he neglected to acknowledge it, we may do so on his behalf, with the deepest gratitude.

The only merit which Morris admits in Bellamy is that of having shown capitalist civilisation in a true and pitiless light: "his criticism of the present monopolist system is forcible and fervid",<sup>112</sup> and he unreservedly praises his "due economical knowledge".<sup>113</sup> On this point, in fact, nothing separates the two utopists unless that Bellamy tends to stress the immorality of the system a good deal more. One other theme they have in common: the indignation aroused by the enormous waste of materials and of human energy for which capitalism is responsible. I shall not insist upon this negative aspect of utopia, which I have deliberately kept out of this study, but it is appropriate, before leaving the purely literary analysis, to stress that here too Bellamy shows himself a writer. The parable in which he compares class society with a coach laden with privileged, unmoving passengers, dragged by the multitude, with everyone outside trying to get aboard and every occupant fearful of falling out,<sup>114</sup> is not lacking in liveliness and would be worthy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Although, on the other hand, the description of the utopian world is dry and abstract, there is real feeling running through the chapter in which Julian West dreams that he is back in his nineteenth-century Boston and suddenly understands the horror of it in the light of revelations of the year 2000.<sup>115</sup>

Morris has paid implicit lip-service to these real qualities in the brief appreciation we have quoted. For him that is not the essence. It is the proposed social system that he resents, and he is the more cantankerous for feeling that he is up against an unyielding dogmatism. Morris rebels against this dogmatism, observing that the "the only safe way of reading a utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author".<sup>116</sup> In fact, what is striking about *Looking Backward* is that nothing is left to chance and that the whole has formidable coherence. Life there, says Morris, is "organized with a vengeance".<sup>117</sup> Notice, too, that it is not a dream: Julian West really is transported to the year 2000 by the end of his catalepsy, and the situation described is presented forcibly as an inevitable fact. Morris's utopia, if we consider its mode, arises from a very different temperament. All his writings show that he is dealing with a hypothesis, one that seems most logical and pleasing to him; but more than once he stops himself making a doctrine out of it. He deliberately leaves obscure the answers to various problems and is not afraid of allowing imprecision, even inconsequence, to creep in now and then. He is careful not to draw up a detailed plan of future society and aims above all to suggest a utopian scale of values. Bellamy would never have given his tale the

genial and modest sub-title which Morris gives his: "Being some chapters from a Utopian romance".

Just as I have excluded from the scope of my analysis the indictment of bourgeois society as it exists in Morris's work, I have in the same way excluded his theory of revolution. However, we must (at least negatively) look at certain aspects in connection with Bellamy, whose system rests upon a certain conception of the achievement of socialism, because this was the very thing that first enraged Morris. The starting-point of Bellamy's utopia, which is what Morris calls its "distinctive part",<sup>118</sup> is the establishment and development of trusts in the United States. Far from deploring the fact, Bellamy sees it as a decisive factor in progress:

"Oppressive and intolerable as was the régime of the great consolidations of capital, even its victims, while they cursed it, were forced to admit the prodigious increase of efficiency which had been imparted to the national industries, the vast economies effected by the concentration of management and unity of organisation, and to confess that since the new system had taken the place of the old the wealth of the world had increased at a rate before undreamed of. To be sure this vast increase had gone chiefly to make the rich richer, increasing the gap between them and the poor; but the fact remained that, as a means of producing wealth, capital had been proved efficient in proportion to its consolidation."<sup>119</sup>

It is at the beginning of the twentieth century, writes Bellamy that "the evolution was completed by the final consolidation of the entire capital of the nation". Far from causing indignation, this fact was accepted by the people without resentment, because they recognised that monopolies represented a necessary link, an indispensable transitional phase. Then peacefully and without any clash came the final result:

"The industry and commerce of the country, ceasing to be conducted by a set of irresponsible corporations and syndicates of private persons at their caprice and for their profit, were intrusted to a single syndicate representing the people, to be conducted in the common interest for the common profit. The nation, that is to say, organized as one great business corporation in which all the other corporations were absorbed; it became the one capitalist in the place of all the other capitalists, the sole employer, the final monopoly in which all previous and lesser monopolies were swallowed up, a monopoly in the profits and economies of which all citizens shared."<sup>120</sup>

As one can easily imagine, this friendly transfer by unanimous consent, this "gradual and peaceable revolution" without class struggle or seizure of political power appeared a monstrous illusion in Morris's eyes. He naturally reproaches Bellamy with confusing the contents and the container:

". . . by the use of the word monopoly he shows unconsciously that he has his mind fixed firmly on the mere *machinery* of life: for clearly the only part of their system which the people would or could take over from the

monopolists would be the machinery of organization, which monopoly is forced to use, but which is not an essential part of it. The essential of monopoly is, I warm myself by the fire which you have made, and you (very much the plural) stay outside in the cold.”<sup>121</sup>

Bellamy declares that “it (the labour question) may be said to have solved itself”, and adds,

“all that society had to do was to recognise and cooperate with that evolution, when its tendency had become unmistakable”.<sup>122</sup>

That is why “there was absolutely no violence”.<sup>123</sup> Later, addressing the Nationalist Club in Boston, which had been founded to spread the doctrine set out in *Looking Backward*, Bellamy declared “We aim to change the law by the law.”<sup>124</sup>

This legalistic gradualism, founded upon the conviction of a happy, spontaneous transformation of capitalism into its opposite, in fact presents, through its systematic logic directed to its aims, a bold and original formulation: it foreshadows what, thirty years later, was to be Kautsky’s “super-imperialism”, denounced by Lenin as reformist, unrealistic and anti-Marxist in character. Bellamy was in this respect both bolder and more dogmatic than the Fabians, against whom Morris was at the time hardening his attitude. He was not long in grasping the relationship between them and the American utopist and seeing in it a reason for his following:

“The success of Mr. Bellamy’s Utopian book, deadly dull as it is, is a straw to show which way the wind blows. The general attention paid to our clever friends, the Fabian lecturers and pamphleteers, is not altogether due to their literary ability; people have really got their heads turned more or less in their direction.”<sup>125</sup>

Bellamy’s bold logic held nothing, in fact, to shock the Fabians, even if it did slightly jostle their cautious reserve and their distrust of utopianism. In one chapter of *Fabian Essays*, Annie Besant in 1889 expressed her admiration for “the ingenious author of *Looking Backward*” and went on to considerations largely drawn from it.<sup>126</sup> Reciprocity was not lacking and, a few years later, in 1894, there appeared in Boston an American edition of *Fabian Essays*, with an introduction by Edward Bellamy.<sup>127</sup> Bellamy, in his many articles and lectures following the publication of his book, very faithfully reproduced the Fabian programme of municipal socialism.<sup>128</sup> Even if it were only an account of this reformism and belief in spontaneity (and we shall find other reasons), it is a little surprising to find Victor Dupont asserting that *Looking Backward* is “one of the rare examples of utopias directly inspired by scientific socialism”, while he paradoxically tends to deny this quality to Morris’s work.<sup>129</sup> A certain knowledge of the general characteristics of capitalist economy (to which Morris himself paid homage) is really not enough for one to see Bellamy as a Marxist. It also involves taking little account of a fact hard to ignore: namely that, according to emphatic witnesses including Bellamy himself, he was *totally* ignorant of Marx and of socialist literature at the time he was writing his book. It does not appear that he subsequently read any of Marx’s



works. The only very indirect knowledge of him that he possessed derived from a later reading of Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth*, and he avowed himself put off by materialism and economic determinism. In the course of his political activity he clearly showed his hostility to socialism, going so far as to declare it an anti-American doctrine. The word "socialist" he wrote to William Dean Howells,

"is a foreign word in itself, and equally foreign in all its suggestions. It smells to the average American of petroleum, suggests the red flag and all manner of sexual novelties, and an abusive tone about God and religion, which in this country we at least treat with decent respect".<sup>130</sup>

A. E. Morgan, Bellamy's interpreter, who perhaps has a tendency like every specialist to exaggerate his hero's rôle, does not hesitate to assert that his influence was decisive in bringing into being that hostility which American opinion has displayed towards Marxism.<sup>131</sup> No doubt there are other reasons for this, which it is not relevant to discuss here, but one cannot deny that this judgment contains some truth.

In this respect *Looking Backward* contains hints about which one could hardly be mistaken. The final transformation of society, Dr. Leete recalls, came about with the support of the "national party", which was able to accomplish what none of the "labour parties" could do, because "their basis, as merely class organizations, was too narrow":

"It was not till a rearrangement of the industrial and social system on a higher ethical basis, and for the more efficient production of wealth, was recognised as the interest, not of one class, but equally of all classes . . . that there was any prospect that it would be achieved."<sup>132</sup>

Not only, writes Bellamy, have "the followers of the red flag" not played any part in establishing the new order, but they were an obstacle as long as they existed, "for their talk so disgusted people as to deprive the best-considered projects for social reform of a hearing". On so good a road the author does not stop. Following a procedure employed by many a "party of order" he lumps together in his description socialists and anarchists, and does not hesitate to assert that they were financed by the capitalists:

"No historical authority nowadays doubts that they were paid by the great monopolies to wave the red flag and talk about burning, sacking, and blowing people up, in order, by alarming the timid, to head off any real reform."<sup>133</sup>

Such insinuations seemed too crude to Morris for him to deign to reply. Putting himself on another level, he was very aware of the danger involved in the spreading of a theory of spontaneity, which must, inevitably, be counter-revolutionary. On the one hand this hope of a peaceful evolution of trusts towards their complete concentration appeared an illusion to him.

"I cannot help thinking", he writes . . . "of the recurrence of break-ups

and re-formations of this kind of monopoly, under the influence of competition for privilege, or war for the division of plunder . . .”

On the other hand, the idea that a simple enumeration of the miseries and waste engendered by capitalism is enough to bring about a better state of affairs seemed all the more dangerous to Morris because his own political thinking had developed remarkably over the last year. Following an article by Bax, published in *Commonweal* in July 1888 and probably inspired by Engels, drawing attention to the penetration into Africa of financial interests, and to the consequences which could follow from this at home, Morris stopped believing in the natural decay of capitalism. On the contrary, he judged it to be capable of singular recoveries, and of successfully coming out of the “great depression” of 1889. So he was led to write of Bellamy’s book: .

“The economic semi-fatalism of some Socialists is a deadening and discouraging view, and may easily become more so, if events at present unforeseen bring back the full tide of ‘commercial prosperity’; which is by no means unlikely to happen.”<sup>134</sup>

The influence of Bellamy’s theories seemed to him so harmful that six months later, giving an account of *Fabian Essays* in *Commonweal* and speaking of this same matter, he denounced this ideology which disarms the working class:

“Though we may well hope that the extravagance of exploitation and contempt of the public shown by these ‘captains of industry’ will lead us on towards Socialism, it is dangerous to rest our hopes on this development, as Mr. Bellamy does in his *Looking Backward*. It may, after all, be nothing but a passing phase of that capitalist organisation of robbery, which surely must be attacked in front by the workers grown conscious of their slavery.”<sup>135</sup>

This reformist gradualism and this theory of spontaneity, while they provoked Morris’s indignation and encouraged him to broaden and sharpen his attacks against the Fabian ideology, would not have been sufficient to provoke the violent reaction whose direct consequence was the writing of *News from Nowhere*. The thing that drove him to fury was Bellamy’s picture of future society, primarily its regimentation. All workers from 21 to 45 years of age are strictly enrolled into the industrial army, according to “the principle of general military service, as it was understood in our day”, and Dr. Leete explains that “our entire social order is wholly based upon and deduced from it” (this principle). The great event of the year is the day of the recruitment parade, 15 October, when young people reaching their majority enter production and the quadragenarians leave active service.<sup>136</sup> The organisation of this army is uniform for all professions and is somewhat complex. Without going into fussy details, we note that the workers are split into four main classes: that of labourers, in which all beginners remain from 21 to 24 years; then that of apprentices, where they remain one year; then, workers proper from 25 to 45 years, split into three grades, each divided into two classes; finally, the officers. Every year everyone is promoted or degraded according to his deserts.<sup>137</sup> The officer corps is a carefully ordered hierarchy up to generals of guilds, lieutenant-generals of groups of guilds and general-in-chief, who is president of

the United States. The junior officers are appointed by their superiors and the officers-general are elected by retired members of the guilds, who thus constitute a sort of gerontocracy.<sup>138</sup> Women constitute a separate army corps, no less hierarchical, and are given lighter tasks.<sup>139</sup> Even the sick, the crippled and mentally defective are grouped into a special corps, wearing its special badge, and carrying out tasks consistent with their aptitudes.<sup>140</sup> Discipline is strict; woe betide him who refuses to carry out his duties, because he can be "cut off from all human society"! <sup>141</sup> Dr. Leete proudly compares the resultant efficiency with "the German army in the time of von Moltke". <sup>142</sup>

Bellamy intended to follow a military career, and at the age of seventeen was rejected at the West Point entrance examination because of physical inadequacy.<sup>143</sup> It seems that this setback was an enormous disappointment for him and left him with a lasting sense of frustration. If every utopia is a matter of temperament, it certainly appears that Bellamy's springs from a well-defined desire for compensation. This seems to be shown in an article he published in 1890 to expand his theories, in which he wrote:

"Is it a wonder that war has a glamour? That glamour we would give to the peaceful pursuits of industry by making them, like the duty of the soldier, public service." <sup>144</sup>

Julian West, returning in his dream to the Boston of his youth, witnesses a military parade and reflects upon the power industry would achieve by introducing "the scientific manner in which the nation went to war". <sup>145</sup> We are not astonished to hear that the first "nationalist club" was founded in Boston in 1888 by a group of retired officers, probably very little suspect as socialists!<sup>146</sup>

The idea of humanity transformed into a "huge standing army, tightly drilled", <sup>147</sup> could only horrify Morris. After reading *Looking Backward* he exclaimed that "if they brigaded him into a regiment of workers he would lie on his back and kick". <sup>148</sup> This strict discipline is reinforced by a bureaucratic production organisation, divided into ten departments and innumerable subordinate services, which exercises so meticulous a control that "even if in the hands of the consumer an article turns out unfit, the system enables the fault to be traced back to the original workman". <sup>149</sup> The distribution of goods, which Bellamy describes particularly complacently, is inspired by the same care for efficiency and centralisation. Little local shops have disappeared, replaced by vast establishments where the citizens do not receive products directly but are presented with a vast range of samples, the same in all localities, from which they make their choice and put in their order. Their purchases are deducted on their credit cards from the annual amount constituting their salaries. The order is transmitted by a system of tubes to a central warehouse which, by means of other tubes, promptly delivers the goods home. <sup>150</sup> It goes without saying that such an organisation, founded upon immense industrial concentration, excludes all craft, all imagination, all human contact between consumer and producer. It is absolute authoritarian uniformity.

Undoubtedly Morris did not reject Bellamy's forecast *en bloc*, and, without being able to speak of borrowings, one detects certain ideas that appealed to him and which he developed in his own utopia, although in different forms and in another spirit: general abundance, the elimination of middlemen and



parasites, the abolition of money and trade. One can observe certain similarities, not only in the realm of economics but even in that of institutions: the disappearance of politics and parties, the simplification of legislation, the enormous decrease in crime and misdemeanour in the absence of any clash of personal interests, the replacement of prisons by hospitals, the absence of lawyers,<sup>151</sup> of fiscal administration, of army and navy.

All these transformations are drawn, certainly against a socialist background, but just what kind of socialism is it? It is true that in the political field the State apparatus is strikingly reduced. However, we observe the survival of a judiciary and of a police force. Much worse, in Morris's eyes, the State is more centralised than ever and the governments of the states of the Union have finally disappeared.<sup>152</sup> He criticises this "huge national centralisation, working by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible", whereas the communism he foresees tends towards direct democracy practised in territorial units as small as possible with everyone participating in public affairs.<sup>153</sup> He objects to the powers given to the retired, who "should form a kind of aristocracy (how curiously the old ideas cling)".<sup>154</sup> But above all it is the weight of this enormous economic machine, this "organisation of life with a vengeance", this "huge standing army", which seem overpowering to him. Bellamy's system, he writes, "may be described as State communism, worked by the very extreme of national centralization".<sup>155</sup>

Morris's condemnation of Bellamy's utopia seems to have been misunderstood by most critics, because of their lack of sufficient understanding of the Marxist theory of two stages upon which Morris's predictions were founded. I shall come back to this at length and at the proper point in our study. For the moment I briefly indicate that Morris, following Marx, saw two successive stages in the construction of the future society. The first, socialism, following the seizure of power by the working class, would be a period of slow and difficult building, in the course of which the proletarian State would liquidate the old class society, take possession of all the means of production and set up an efficient and democratic economy. This State, by force of circumstances, would be authoritarian and would need to possess means of coercion. But it would only be transitional. When democracy was established and the new economy reached abundance, when many of the contradictions had been overcome, a new era would dawn, that of communism, the fundamental characteristic of which would be the withering away of the State. Morris looked forward to the first stage, characterised by state socialism, without pleasure and even with some apprehension, but he regarded it as inevitable. He hoped it would be as short as possible, and in his utopian fervour, all his hopes and attentions were centred on the second stage, that of a fully achieved communism as described in *News from Nowhere*. The essential idea is that the first stage could not in any circumstances be regarded as the culmination, an end in itself. Now this is exactly what he reproaches Bellamy with. The latter, in his preface, certainly speaks of "the progress that shall be made, ever onward and upward, till the race shall achieve its ineffable destiny".<sup>156</sup> In an article published in September 1889 by the Christian-socialist magazine *Dawn* and reproduced as a postscript in many editions of *Looking Backward*, he asserts that the Americans of the year 2000 would not be content with the social state they would have reached and would not consider it as "anything more than a single

step in the infinite progression of humanity towards the divine".<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, there is not a single line of the story to suggest what this "ineffable destiny" might be. The social system in question is an enormous State machine with minute gears, of which it seems to be impossible to modify the tiniest cog. Everything in it seems to be immutable, and there is no prospect of evolution. But in the eyes of Morris, the Marxist, the state of the productive forces would allow transition to a higher stage, and such socialism could only be a dead end or an abortion. This excessive centralisation appears to him as a caricature of a structure of the first stage, during which the first lineaments of the succeeding stage should appear little by little. That is exactly why the success of *Looking Backward* seriously worried Morris:

"The book is one to be read and considered seriously, but it should not be taken as the Socialist bible of reconstruction; a danger which perhaps it will not altogether escape, as *incomplete*<sup>158</sup> systems impossible to be carried out but plausible on the surface are always attractive to people ripe for change, but not knowing clearly what their aim is."<sup>159</sup>

At that particular time, Bellamy's book, with its dogmatic form, risked both distorting the theoretical education of the militants and turning away sympathisers.

"It requires notice all the more because there is a certain danger in such books as this: a two-fold danger; for there will be some temperaments to whom the answer given to the question, How shall we live then? will be pleasing and satisfactory, others to whom it will be displeasing and unsatisfactory. The danger to the first is that they will accept it with all its necessary errors and fallacies (which such a book *must* abound in) as conclusive statements of facts and rules of action, which will warp their efforts into futile directions. The danger to the second, if they are but enquirers or very young Socialists, is that they also accepting its speculations as facts will be inclined to say, If *that* is Socialism, we won't help its advent, as it holds out no hope to us."<sup>160</sup>

It was to give hope back to socialists that Morris wrote *News from Nowhere* to show that beyond the wall raised up by Bellamy opened the great humanist concept of communism, that the future could not be brought to a stop in the sacrosanct and mechanical discipline of state socialism. More's utopia was also presented in the form of a hierarchical, disciplined and immutable world. But Morris did not think it necessary to criticise this aspect. Steeped in historical materialism as he was, he saw this as the healthy reaction of a man of true mediaeval values face to face with the mad individualism of the new men: the hierarchy remained a formal hierarchy based upon human relationships. But above all More was not looking into the future: his utopia was timeless, and, on his own avowal, still unrealisable. Bellamy, on the other hand, was starting from the definite economic circumstances of the nineteenth century to build the future, and, if Morris could not agree about the manner of the change to socialism he accepted willy-nilly the eventuality of state socialism. What he would not accept was the extreme nature of the imagined régime, nor would he accept its permanence. Over and above the deep repugnance he felt for the mechanisation of life in Bellamy's system, Morris's

opposition was, most of all, based upon his conception of finalities, that is of chronology. It seems very probable to us that the revolutionary chronology of *News from Nowhere* was determined in relation to *Looking Backward* and in reaction against its implications. Bellamy's tale is placed in the year 2000 and, he writes, "the present organisation of society is, in its completeness, less than a century old".<sup>161</sup> Morris deliberately puts back the date of the great change to 1952: he is no gradualist, the change was to be a real revolution with a seizure of power by the proletariat, and the ability of capital to survive and to resist was not to be under-estimated. His own story is placed in the middle of the twenty-second century, and, of the two hundred years which have passed since the revolution, the first fifty were enough to effect the transition through the first stage. He feels sure that after one and a half centuries of communism nothing could be left of state socialism after the Bellamy pattern.

To these theoretical oppositions was added the profound clash of two totally different sensibilities and of two fundamental conceptions of the very quality of life. Morris placed work at the heart of existence. If, in capitalist society, it had become a sordid chore, the first task of communism would be to make it once more a need and a joy, by way of diversity of occupation and man's expression of himself through his work. The Calvinist Bellamy would have none of this; faithful to the theological concept of the original curse, he explicitly calls it "the edict of Eden".<sup>162</sup> The strict discipline which prevents anybody's avoiding work comes not only from economic necessity but also from moral, even religious needs. Work is man's natural punishment, but utopia, founded on the right to happiness, removes its excessive bitterness and unfairness by mechanising it, and rewards twenty-four years of toil by a long retirement free of all productive effort, to allow the free blossoming of individuality:

"Know, O child of another race and yet the same, that the labor we have to render as our part in securing for the nation the means of a comfortable physical existence is by no means regarded as the most important, the most interesting, or the most dignified employment of our powers. We look upon it as a necessary duty to be discharged before we can fully devote ourselves to the higher exercise of our faculties, the intellectual and spiritual enjoyments and pursuits which alone mean life."<sup>163</sup>

Such a break seems completely senseless to Morris:

"... everybody is to begin the serious work of production at the age of twenty-one, work three years as a labourer, and then choose his skilled occupation and work till he is forty-five, when he is to knock off his work and amuse himself (improve his mind, if he has one left him). Heavens! think of a man of forty-five changing his habits suddenly and by compulsion!"

For him it would be a poor compensation to become a member of a judicial and political aristocracy.<sup>164</sup> Nothing was more alien to all Morris's aspirations than this total break between the individual and his job, which Bellamy made a real article of faith.<sup>165</sup> In the America of the year 2000, the allocation of labour is done according to the law of supply and demand. If a particular occupation is short of workers it is made more attractive by decreasing the work-



ing hours. But diversity of employment is excluded. The individual is free at the beginning to choose his work according to his aptitudes, but thereafter he is a specialist. If he has mistaken his vocation, he can go in another direction, but he is not encouraged to do so and can only do so up to the age of thirty-five.<sup>166</sup> This monotony, added to the traditional concept of task-work, repels Morris:

"... variety of life," he replies to Bellamy, "is as much an aim of true Communism as equality of condition, and ... nothing but a union of these two will bring about real freedom."<sup>167</sup>

What incentives to work would there be in such a society? Not the hope of a higher standard of living, since the credit card is the same for all, and Morris congratulates him, moreover, on having understood

"the necessity for the equality of the reward of labour, which is such a stumbling-block for incomplete Socialists".<sup>168</sup>

Bellamy recognises that disciplinary obligation would not be enough, and, on the other hand, he does not share the confidence in mankind that animates Morris's humanism. No doubt, he writes, there are noble-natured beings who do not need stimulus.

"But all men, even in the last year of the twentieth century, are not of this high order, and the incentives to endeavor requisite for those who are not must be of a sort adapted to their inferior natures."<sup>169</sup>

Well, first there is the desire to reach the higher ranks of the industrial army. "Our young men," says Dr. Leete, "are very greedy of honours."<sup>170</sup> They will be laden down with them:

"diligence in the national service is the sole and certain way to public repute, social distinction and official power".<sup>171</sup>

There will even be "special privileges and immunities in the way of discipline".<sup>172</sup> Another factor just as much at work is the sex urge. The code of education for women trains them only to give their hands to meritorious workers.<sup>173</sup> These, thinks Morris, are wretched expedients:

"In this part of his scheme, ... Mr. Bellamy worries himself unnecessarily in the seeking (with obvious failure) some incentive to labour to replace the fear of starvation, which is at present our only one, whereas it cannot be too often repeated that the true incentive to useful and happy labour is and must be pleasure in the work itself."<sup>174</sup>

In the same way Morris has no sympathy for the way machines have invaded the world of Bellamy's utopia. He himself did not hide the need, during the first stage, to rely largely on mechanisation to produce the plenty needed for the introduction of communism. But for him it is only transitional, and we shall see how he envisages development into a world where man, master of energy and its uses, refuses to sacrifice the harmonious use of his native skills. *Looking Backward*, on the other hand, certainly seems to introduce a gadget-civilisation. A gigantic network of tubes ensures communication and distribution, and all operations connected with it are performed by machines.<sup>175</sup>

Washing, cooking, repairs are all done electrically in public establishments.<sup>176</sup> An automatic system of canopies shelters the pavements in the event of bad weather.<sup>177</sup> And, above all, every house is telephonically linked to a transmitting station with many programmes which pours music and sermons into each home, twenty-four hours a day.<sup>178</sup> As A. L. Morton ironically remarks, that appears to be the only pleasure the inhabitants know,<sup>179</sup> and another historian of utopias, certainly better disposed towards Bellamy, cannot refrain from reproaching him for a “grim mechanical ideal”.<sup>180</sup> That is certainly the opinion of William Morris, who attempts to overcome the problem and get to the bottom of things:

“In short, a machine-life is the best which Mr. Bellamy can imagine for us on all sides; it is not to be wondered at then that his only idea of making labour tolerable is to decrease the amount of it by means of fresh and ever fresh developments of machinery. This view I know he will share with many Socialists with whom I might otherwise agree more than I can with him . . . this ideal of the great reduction of the hours of labour by the mere means of machinery is a futility. The human race has always put forth about as much energy as it could in given conditions of climate . . . and the development of man’s resources, which has given him greater powers over nature, has driven him also into fresh desires and fresh demands on nature, and thus made his expenditure of energy much what it was before. I believe that this will always be so, and the multiplication of machinery will just – multiply machinery.”<sup>181</sup>

That is exactly what Morris observes in the world described by Bellamy: Dr. Leete proudly proclaims that they have “given a prodigious impulse to labor-saving inventions in all sorts of industry”,<sup>182</sup> but also that there are products for which “popular taste fluctuates, and novelty is frequently required”.<sup>183</sup> This gigantic industrial army, writes Morris, is “compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and absurd, that may cast up among them”.

In a rational, egalitarian and truly human society, men’s burdens would at last be lightened, and they would regain their dignity and their essential being simply by the elimination of unnecessary tasks:

“... it is probable that much of our so-called ‘refinement’, our luxury – in short our civilization – will have to be sacrificed.”<sup>184</sup>

This unlimited industrialisation has another consequence which Morris finds abominable, that of reducing life to a totally urban civilisation. It is a fact worthy of comment, showing clearly the extent to which the logic of a system can override personal tastes, that Bellamy himself was by no means a town-dweller. He spent almost his whole life in his straggling village of Chicopee Falls and hardly knew Boston: he even had to use a town plan when writing *Looking Backward*!<sup>185</sup> Compton-Rickett sets the “urban socialism” of the American utopist against the “rural socialism” of Morris,<sup>186</sup> which is excessive because Morris’s aim was to resolve the contradiction between town and country. But it is certain that this does not show for a moment in

Bellamy's account, with one near exception which our poet picks up with acerbity in his criticism:

"Mr. Bellamy's ideas of life are curiously limited; he has no idea beyond existence in a great city; his dwelling of man in the future is Boston (U.S.A.) beautified. In one passage, indeed, he mentions villages, but with unconscious simplicity shows that they do not come within his scheme of economical equality, but are mere servants of the great centres of civilization. This seems strange to some of us, who cannot help thinking that our experience ought to have taught us that such aggregations of population afford the worst possible form of dwelling place . . ." <sup>187</sup>

All these elements contribute to creating or reinforcing the petty-bourgeois climate, this atmosphere of "cockney paradise" which exasperated Morris when he read the book. He himself, to tell the truth, was apprehensive that some such climate would obtain during the first phase of socialist society and that the proletariat, after centuries of privation, would be content with a "dull level of mediocrity". But what Bellamy described seemed worse still to him, and further worsened by its permanent nature. The characters introduced are cut off from any industrial or rural working background. They are petty-bourgeois, as little different as possible from their 1887 ancestors, having kept the same way of life and the same cultural ideal.

"The equal wealth and equal opportunities of culture which all persons now enjoy," Dr. Leete explains to Julian West, "have simply made us all members of one class, which corresponds to the most fortunate class with you." <sup>188</sup>

The development of teaching, he says again, has allowed everyone to acquire "what you used to call the education of a gentleman", <sup>189</sup> and the reasons he gives for this development are suggestive:

"The cultured man in your age was like one up to the neck in a nauseous bog solacing himself with a smelling bottle. You see, perhaps, now, how we look at this question of universal high education. No single thing is so important to every man as to have for neighbors intelligent, companionable persons." <sup>190</sup>

One cannot even say that Dr. Leete's conversation reveals a very high level of culture or imagination. He refuses to be astonished at anything whatsoever "when it can be explained scientifically", <sup>191</sup> and his complacent and selective admiration is given to anything which, in this new world, contributes to efficiency and comfort. He has a good measure of philistinism and utilitarianism *à la* Gradgrind, wrapped in insipid and unctuous spiritualism. His life in retirement, with his daughter and colourless wife, has something traditionally cramped about it, and one cannot say that the frequent listenings to the telephone-radio bring a very elevating stimulus to it. The Sunday sermon broadcast in this way, which Bellamy reproduces from beginning to end, without sparing us a line, devoutly punctuated with "Ah! my friends!", exalts the divine mission of the new society in the flattest tones of neo-conformism. We know nothing whatever of how Mrs. Leete occupied herself, freed as she was from domestic cares by perfect equipment. As for the occupation of their



daughter Edith (who, curiously enough, does not appear to have been conscripted into the female corps of the industrial army), they appear to consist exclusively of going round the shops: "an indefatigable shopper", <sup>192</sup> her mother calls her. We admire the tenacity of Victorian customs: thus, at the end of a meal, the ladies withdraw, leaving the men to talk freely. <sup>193</sup> Bellamy's collectivism is tempered by very interesting traces of the spirit of keeping oneself to oneself. In general, meals are no longer prepared at home and we go with the Leetes and their guest to the local communal restaurant, hoping to see the new humanity more closely and to meet them in their daily existence. Our hopes remain vain, for in this restaurant each family has its private dining room, where it is served by a waiter in a "slightly distinctive uniform" and whose manner is that "of a soldier on duty". <sup>194</sup> Did Morris think of this dreary picture when he was writing about his pretty girls and jolly guests in his Guest House? A whiff of individualism seems, too, to impregnate the whole of public life in this world where each strives to achieve a higher rank. The women are not left out, for, as Dr. Leete informs us, "our girls are as full of ambition for their careers as our boys". <sup>195</sup> As for Julian West, he has no trouble over linking up with his past and one of his first cares is to insinuate himself into the new structure and find himself a good position.

A. L. Morton, whose penetrating observations are always worthy of attention, sees in this collection of details the reason for the extraordinary popularity of *Looking Backward*.

"At a time," he writes, "when the professional classes and the small producers, who were still very numerous, felt caught between the Trusts and the militant workers, they were offered a prospect of Advance Without Tears, a socialism which did not force them to take sides in the battle." <sup>196</sup>

We are convinced, from his own evidence, that such was Bellamy's exact and deliberate intent. In a letter to one of the organisers of the "nationalist movement", he wrote explicitly:

"I thoroughly approve what you say about directing your efforts more particularly to the conversion of the cultured and conservative class. That was precisely the special end for which *Looking Backward* was written." <sup>197</sup>

Morris made no mistake. In his article in *Commonweal*, he wonders whether Bellamy really is a socialist and presumes that he would be

"... perfectly satisfied with modern civilisation, if only the injustice, misery, and waste of class society could be got rid of; which half-change seems possible to him. The only ideal of life which such a man can see is that of the industrious *professional* middle-class men of today purified from their crime of complicity with the monopolist class, and become independent instead of being, as they are now are, parasitical." <sup>198</sup>

Morris's tone becomes violent and personal when he comes to the defence of the human values to which he was most strongly attached. If utopia is a matter of temperament, Bellamy's is, typically, "unhistoric and unartistic". <sup>199</sup> It is plain that one cannot find in *Looking Backward* the slightest consideration of

humanity's past, the slightest search for a cultural heritage. The absence of a living tradition, which makes American civilisation so unattractive in Morris's eyes, is accentuated by an arid and formless modernism, bizarrely intermingled with the worst Victorian hideousness. The occasional precise details which bedeck the narrative must have turned our poet's stomach. The description of the neighbourhood big store is especially distressing:

"... above the portal, standing out from the front of the building, a majestic life-size group of statuary, the central figure of which was a female ideal of Plenty, with her cornucopia".

Inside stretches a vast hall, its air freshened by a "magnificent fountain", and the light, coming from a vast cupola, is softened by the velvet tones of the frescoes which adorn ceiling and walls: we are left unaware of the subjects or motifs and their only purpose appears to be to "soften" the light.<sup>200</sup> Such are the only revelations of the visual arts of the new age. The most that we learn in addition is that the public buildings are "of colossal size", and that Boston is full of fountains and statues, but on this occasion we are spared the description of them.<sup>201</sup> As in Morris's utopia, the taste for luxury is transferred to these buildings and simplicity prevails in the home,<sup>202</sup> but whereas Morris likes "elbow-room", the houses are small and contain the minimum of furniture in order to facilitate upkeep.<sup>203</sup> The furniture, moreover, has not changed at all since the nineteenth century. Bellamy's only aesthetic originality is his insistence upon diffused artificial lighting.<sup>204</sup> Finally, in the matter of dress, although women's clothes have shed their grotesque voluminousness, men's have not undergone any appreciable change.<sup>205</sup> But these are details which have a very secondary place in the story. Beauty for Bellamy is clearly a conventional adjunct giving the whole the seal of respectability. This philistine attitude arouses Morris's indignant repudiation. Art, he replies,

"is not a mere adjunct of life which free and happy men can do without, but the necessary expression and indispensable instrument of human happiness".<sup>206</sup>

The happiness and, more accurately perhaps, the blossoming of mankind are the major themes of Morris's utopia. It would be unjust to imagine that they lie outside Bellamy's preoccupations, but his passion for organisation at any price seems to override any other consideration. This results in the profound difference of viewpoint which we sense immediately in their approach to anything to do with human development. However, they both foresee certain similarities of progress, and I am very tempted to believe that Morris has taken several ideas from Bellamy, even though they assume a very different hue in his own utopia. The first, undoubtedly common to many utopists, but which takes a particular twist and convincing force through the new form of anticipatory vision, is that of man's physical transformation and the general improvement in public health. It would be surprising, says Dr. Leete to Julian, if it were otherwise:

"In your day, riches debauched one class with idleness of mind and body, while poverty sapped the vitality of the masses by overwork, bad food, and pestilent homes." <sup>201</sup>

Morris does not put it any differently. On a definite point, we may wonder whether he did not find in Bellamy the suggestion of another idea to which he gave loud expression: the women no longer have the elegant chlorotic pallor of the Victorian era and have no shame over their splendid health. This seems to stand out from the portrait of Edith Leete:

"Feminine softness and delicacy were in this lovely creature deliciously combined with an appearance of health and abounding physical vitality too often lacking in the maidens with whom alone I could compare her."<sup>208</sup>

This difference from the women of the nineteenth century, "who seem to have been so generally sickly",<sup>209</sup> Bellamy attributes to their obligation to work. From this improvement in general health, due to better conditions of living, he deduces one consequence which Morris advances much further: the increase in the expectation of life to eighty-five or ninety.<sup>210</sup> In *News from Nowhere* the idea of longevity achieves triumphal expression. It is probably inaccurate to assume that we are dealing with a borrowing, or an inspiration. But perhaps the recent, stormy reading of *Looking Backward* caused in Morris's mind the crystallisation of certain ideas which had already matured or again the realisation that these ideas should be picked up and improved on in the development of his own utopia.

It is curious that Bellamy, despite his Fabianism, uses the same terms as Morris to condemn the tendency of the contemporary feminist movement to create among women an "unnatural rivalry with men", and he wants account to be taken of the natural differences between the sexes in the allocation of tasks.<sup>211</sup> Bellamy, like Morris (and perhaps more than him), proclaims absolute equality, but he also stresses one interesting aspect of the new people: women no longer have any timidity, any feeling of inferiority to men and can, "without any discredit to her sex, reveal an unsolicited love".<sup>212</sup> It is true that when placed in this situation Edith Leete shows wholly conventional reactions, giving the lie to this fine principle, and simpers unrestrainedly at the idea of "throwing herself into the arms of one she has known but a week".<sup>213</sup> Her general attitude is that of a well-brought-up young lady of the worthy bourgeoisie; she differs very little from her ancestor, Edith Bartlett, Julian's fiancée of the previous century, and nothing is more striking than the contrast between her and the wonderful Ellen of *News from Nowhere*, who passionately embodies the happiness and freedom of communist mankind. Other stale whiffs of bourgeois values must have put Morris off during his reading. Eugenics is a natural preoccupation of all utopists, but Bellamy's fancies on the point were hardly calculated to attract him. "For the first time in history," says Dr. Leete, "the principle of sexual selection, with its tendency to preserve and transmit the better types of the race, and let the inferior types drop out, has unhindered operation." Here in fact is the new feminine morality:

"... to wed greatly now is not to marry men of fortune or title, but those who have risen above their fellows by the solidity or brilliance of their services to humanity. These form nowadays the only aristocracy with which alliance is distinction".

Therein, asserts the doctor, lies the surest and most efficacious spur to work.



The whole upbringing of girls is strictly oriented in this direction. One of them would need a great deal of courage and would be forced to "defy the opinion of her generation" if she fell in love with a man of inferior type, who was, consequently, pledged to celibacy:

"Our women have risen to the full height of their responsibility as the wardens of the world to come to whose keeping the keys of the future are confided. Their feeling of duty in this respect amounts to a sense of consecration. It is a cult in which they educate their daughters from childhood."<sup>214</sup>

Nothing was more alien to Morris than this idea of coercive selection. It bore too much resemblance to the distortion of the Darwinian theory of natural selection that the nineteenth century bourgeoisie had adopted to justify their rule, and the idea of this matrimonial aristocracy of merit held nothing appealing. In the smiling world of *News from Nowhere*, liberation from the scourge of capitalism has, after several generations, sufficed to "take the sting out of heredity" and spread intelligence and beauty broadly among men and women, so that "each finds his own" without conflict and while humanity continues to blossom.

When we get down to basic facts, a fundamental divergence shows between Morris's ideology and Bellamy's. The latter remains true to the old speculative humanism. He believes in an abstract, unchangeable man, who responds to changing stimuli as the conditions of life itself change.<sup>215</sup> In fact, Bellamy's eternal man has remained, in the year 2000, the man of 1887 and has adapted the new institutions to his "eternal nature". For Morris, the Marxist, on the contrary, the human essence, in the words of the *Theses on Feuerbach*,

"is no abstraction inherent in each single individual; in its reality it is the *ensemble* of the social relations".

So the mankind described in *News from Nowhere*, transformed by the production relationships of communism, has nothing in common with that of Bellamy's "cockney paradise".

However, these two humanisms, the one abstract, the other dialectical and concrete, meet in parallel formulations, whose similarity, at the first glance, goes a long way. Bellamy speaks in his novel of the "solidarity of the race" and of "the brotherhood of man".<sup>216</sup> He had written an article on "the religion of solidarity" and, defining the principles of his "nationalist movement", he asserted that "the sentiment of human brotherhood, which is the animating principle of Nationalism, is a religion in itself".<sup>217</sup> Morris for his part speaks over and over again of the religion of humanity. This was a formula made fashionable by Comtism, which he adopted without, as far as he was concerned, giving it any mystical character. But this language in Bellamy produces an unexpected turn of thought that appears to have inspired Morris directly. In the sermon broadcast over the telephone, the preacher declares that, after the transformation of institutions, "it was for the first time possible to see what unpervverted human nature really was like", and that these noble qualities, re-discovered, have "for the first time in human history tempted mankind to fall in love with itself".<sup>218</sup> Stripping this humanism of its speculative ideology, Morris says that the "religion of humanity" will cease, in

the era of communism, to be a ritual formula which the present hardly justifies, and it will be so not at all because "eternal man" will have been cleared of the blemishes of bourgeois civilisation, but because the new social relationships will have created new individuals, truly worthy of being loved. With Bellamy, in fact, one is always dealing with man in the abstract and not with individuals. In private notes, which A. E. Morgan published for the first time in his study, he repudiated the diversity of the psyche:

"The important variations are very few. The Deity did not task his ingenuity much in devising personalities. And rightly, for the impersonal life which all have in common is the only important part of men or women."<sup>219</sup>

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Starting from this conception, one understands better how much there could be in Bellamy's future humanity that is all-embracing, undifferentiated, even totalitarian. Against this is ranged Morris's utopian ultimate, where communism means the free development of the individual.

This religion of human brotherhood which, in Morris's case, possesses the simple quality of depth of feeling, totally devoid of any metaphysical content, is, with Bellamy, saturated with a deistic spiritism which, while not strictly confessional, never breaks with the Christian theology that Morris's materialism had long since discarded. The high point of the American story is reached when they listen by telephone to the Sunday sermon on the moral and divine value of the new institutions. "It is very easy," asserts the preacher, "to believe in the fatherhood of God in the twentieth century."<sup>220</sup> Men, he goes on, are now "images of God indeed, not the travesties of Him they had seemed."<sup>221</sup> And in concluding his sermon he evokes mankind's utopian future in mystical terms:

"For twofold is the return of man to God 'who is our home', the return of the individual by way of death, and the return of the race by the fulfilment of the evolution, when the divine secret hidden in the germ shall be perfectly unfolded."<sup>222</sup>

It is not in the least surprising to discover that Bellamy's nationalist movement, founded by retired officers, was later taken under the wing of the Theosophical Society.<sup>223</sup> Despite his profound tolerance and the respect he always showed for anybody's convictions, Morris could not fail to feel his antipathy increased towards a utopia where traditional belief in God was added to so many elements which aroused his indignation. The violence of his reaction can be measured by the opposite extremes he sometimes reaches in *News from Nowhere*.<sup>224</sup> It can be measured, too, by the promptitude with which he began to write his own utopia. A bare six months separate its first appearance in *Commonweal* (11 January 1890) from the article on *Looking Backward* (22 June 1889). When, at the end of 1890, a pirate edition of *News from Nowhere* appeared in the United States, copied straight from the issues of *Commonweal*, not only did he not take offence or show any intention of prosecuting, he announced the news to Bruce Glasier joyfully.<sup>225</sup> It must have given him satisfaction to be able in this way to carry his contradiction of his adversary into his own land

and to put his vision of the future full development of humanity in direct opposition to a prediction he regarded as an aberration and a dead end.

I would not want to close this chapter on the possible influence upon Morris of earlier utopias without making, in an interrogative way, one complementary suggestion. Bulwer Lytton's novel *The Coming Race*, published in 1871, had a degree of success. Did Morris read it? The total absence throughout his writings of the slightest reference to this book leaves it doubtful. Certain themes important in *News from Nowhere* had already appeared there. The mysterious "force" which propels Morris's barges and which is available everywhere recalls the "vril" of Bulwer Lytton. The theme of longevity is common to both utopias. Finally, on one very particular point, namely the new direction assumed by literature in the new society, I have taken a passage which curiously resembles later remarks by Morris's Ellen. A Utopian of the underground world described by Bulwer Lytton says to the visitor:

"We find by referring to the great masterpieces in that department of literature which we all still read with pleasure, that they consist in the portraiture of passions which we no longer experience – ambition, vengeance, unhallowed love, the thirst for war-like renown, and such like . . . No one can express such passions now, for no one can feel them, or meet with any sympathy in his readers if he did. Again, the old poetry has a main element in its dissection of those complex mysteries of human character which conduce to abnormal vices and crimes, or lead to signal and extraordinary virtues. But our society, having got rid of temptations to any prominent vices and crimes, has necessarily rendered the moral average so equal, that there are no very salient virtues." <sup>226</sup>

The tone is undoubtedly very different, but the idea is the same. However, in the absence of any evidence, let us beware of jumping to hasty conclusions.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *Mediaevalism and its Utopian Ferments*

William Morris's utopian speculations did not take shape until the 'eighties and did not find final expression until after his active adhesion to socialism. The ideological framework of his investigation of the future, as we shall have ample opportunity of establishing, was historical materialism. But when, in 1883, he joined the ranks of Hyndman's Democratic Federation, he was already forty-nine, with a great volume of aesthetic and literary creation behind him. Not only did he not deny this past, but he found in it the rational justification for his decision. It was as an artist that he became a revolutionary. It was because capitalist society stifled art and annihilated the human values necessary to its development that he wanted to take part in political and social action to overthrow this inhuman system and assure men the full development of their capacities. This new humanity, as it grew up before his utopian eyes, was not abstract and speculative but presented composite characteristics. On the one hand, it was the logical result of a new way of life, the communist way of life, founded upon theoretical data conforming to historical laws; on the other hand, it was the realisation of the aspirations of a real man living in the real conditions of the nineteenth century – not merely the aspirations of an isolated individual, but those of a great social stratum, expressing itself through his voice after having been expressed through those of many artists and thinkers whose message had shaped his own evolution.

I feel it would be superfluous, when so many others have already done so, to make another analysis of the revolt against industrial civilisation, against its ugliness and its injustice, which mark the art and literature of the Victorian era. I only wish to refer here to one aspect of that revolt which seems to me to have been important in the construction of Morris's utopia – namely, the glorification of the Middle Ages by the writers and artists of the nineteenth century. In the face of the hideousness of the industrial towns, the poverty of the workers, the impoverishment and humiliation of the petty bourgeoisie, of unbridled individualism and the profit motive, many among them felt the need to justify their inadaptability or their failure to conform by having recourse to a historical reference. Incapable, through their class loyalties or lack of political and social awareness, of glimpsing the least prospect for the future beyond timid reforms, they turned to the past, towards what seemed to be the most perfect antithesis of the unacceptable present. And their romantic fervour converted the Middle Ages into a golden age. Their mediaevalism was sometimes pure aesthetic escapism, sometimes a critical weapon, sometimes passionate historical research. Morris passed through all these phases. His originality lay in going far beyond, and in transforming, as it were, negative

mediaevalism into positive mediaevalism. Abandoning nostalgia and jeremiads, he armed himself with the data of scientific socialism in order to push ajar the doors of the future. But the very uncertainty of anticipation drove him to give the characters of his utopia definite features, moral and aesthetic as well as material. He was obliged to draw upon the *ensemble* of pre-capitalist values, rediscovered by his immediate predecessors, to suggest the face of the new humanity. The stage of thinking he then reached separated him radically from many of the forms of previous mediaevalism. This is why our study of sources in this field will be purposely limited to the ideological aspects which survived this great transformation. We shall pass rapidly over minor survivals, even if they are linked with great names, and come to the ideology of Ruskin which was already a synthesis and even more: in fact, it constitutes a first draft of positive mediaevalism, and was the original inspiration of Morris's utopianism before it was grafted into the framework of his scientific socialism in a strange, almost harmonious intertwining.

### 1. Walter Scott, Keats, the Pre-Raphaelites, William Blake

I shall not, then, retrace the successive stages of Morris's immense mediaeval culture, and on this point refer the reader to Mackail's biography and to the solid and documented studies of E. P. Thompson and Margaret Grennan. Let us just recall that at the age of four the poet was devouring the novels of Walter Scott, that by the age of seven he had read them all, and that he reread them passionately all his life. This lasting tenderness was not without banter, and he reproaches the author of *The Antiquary* for having felt the need to excuse himself for loving an art and a way of life which it was still general to regard as barbarous.<sup>1</sup> What Morris owes to Scott, much more than a taste for a certain kind of imagery, was "a longing to know something real of the lives of those who have gone before us".<sup>2</sup> From his childhood he found among the characters of the *Waverley Novels*, not conventional heroes with set attitudes, but human beings leading ordinary lives; not only lords and great ladies, but yeomen and swineherds. Warlike prowess goes side by side with the lowly details of daily life. Scott's inspiration was often of the people, and the rebellious tones of John Ball echo the sarcasms of the buffoon Wamba. It is a Middle Ages characterised by a robust attachment to the things of this world.<sup>3</sup>

This realistic mediaevalism had to withstand the considerable ascendancy of aestheticism during the Oxford years and the Pre-Raphaelite period. The daily décor of what remained of old Oxford, whose quadrangular architecture haunted Morris's memory when he came to describe the homes of the twenty-second century, was a real setting which his history-ridden imagination peopled with real characters, despite their stylisation. The poems of *The Defence of Guenevere*, with their passionate humanity and the absence of languor, contrast sharply with the dreamings of Rossetti. The influence of Keats, then predominant, did not affect both poets in the same way. Certainly it turned Morris towards an escapist mediaevalism for some long years. But Keats's escapism already contained the denunciation of the hideousness of the modern town ("the jumbled heap of murky buildings") and a yearning for visual beauty closely allied with a love of nature. Even along the road of escapism Morris extracted lessons in realism. What he appreciated above all in Keats was that

he, quite unlike Shelley, had eyes to see.<sup>4</sup> The dream held living forms and Morris's utopia strongly maintained this characteristic. In this respect nothing seems more significant than the memory of the final lines of the *Ode to a Nightingale*, ("Was it a vision or a waking dream? – Fled is that music: Do I wake or sleep?") which we find in the last lines of *News from Nowhere*: "... and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream". Whether it is concerned with the past or the future, the reading of Keats blazed the trail from dream to vision for Morris. It sharpened his eye at the same time as it encouraged him to leave reality behind.

This fervour of vision, thus enriched, is perhaps even more important than Morris's debt to Pre-Raphaelitism, and here one must walk cautiously. In fact, it has become a lazy habit to include Morris among the Pre-Raphaelites. This hasty definition is doubtless explicable, but only corresponds to facts in a very partial way: it takes no account of the time factor and is a result of several confusions. When, in 1856, Morris became acquainted with Rossetti, the Brotherhood, properly speaking, hardly existed any more. It was only an aftermath of the Pre-Raphaelite ideology, crystallising for Morris through the personality of Dante Gabriel, who held him under his spell for two years.<sup>5</sup> But it was not long before events separated these two completely dissimilar men. The silent intimate drama of the shared affections of Jane, who had become Rossetti's fantasy figure, and the latter's petty attitude at the time of the creation of the Morris Firm, emphasised the incompatibilities and led to the final break in 1875. The mediaevalism which marked Morris's poetical work during all this period quickly diverged from the mystical and sensual subtleties which delighted the genius of Rossetti. While imitation of him is clear in youthful poems such as *Praise of my Lady*, with its refrain of *Beata mea Domina*, one can find scarcely a trace remaining of this infatuation in *The Earthly Paradise* where the much more earthy influence of Chaucer is predominant. The two journeys to Iceland, in 1871 and 1873, freed Morris, as he states himself, "from the maundering side of mediaevalism".<sup>6</sup> He had found a people living in somewhat primitive conditions, faithful to ancestral traditions, among whom social inequality was not blatant and whose human contacts, warm and simple, perhaps lingered in his memory as a preliminary outline for the easy fraternity of *News from Nowhere*. He had also become acquainted with nordic literature, and the heroic ruggedness of the Sagas gave him a taste for virile activities and feelings. This was the starting point for a study of barbarian society which was to have a two-fold influence upon his thinking. On the one hand, he came to think that whatever was best in the mediaeval heritage was a survival from an older past. On the other, the catastrophic ideology of the Sagas, with their myth of the twilight of the gods, the "*ragna rök*", involved his utopia in a long alternative between barbarism and socialism.<sup>7</sup>

About 1877, Morris's new political and social preoccupations snatched him for ever away from the lures of pure art. However, in the realm of the visual arts, the break with Pre-Raphaelite mediaevalism is, at first glance, less appreciable, and it is because of this that the hasty judgment to which we have referred has been made. Such an idea comes naturally to the mind of anyone visiting the William Morris Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum and seeing the Gothic heaviness of his furniture, adorned with very conventional mediaeval scenes. Remember that this room, formerly the Green Dining



Room, was decorated by the Firm in 1867. If the same visitor explores the furniture rooms in the Museum, he will discover a later and very different phase in the Firm's products, with a simplicity and elegance of line foreshadowing the trends of modern art. Nevertheless it is true that, up to the last stage of typographical design at the Kelmscott Press, the Pre-Raphaelite influence persisted. That is where the ambiguity comes in. Most of these creations were the result of collaboration, the decorative part being Morris's work, and the figures by Burne-Jones, who remained true to Rossetti's aesthetics to the end of his life. That is exactly why I am inclined to think that, taken together, Morris's visual creations leave a sometimes false impression and that they retarded his literary and ideological creativity. The two artists were liked in a friendship that was extraordinary and, when one examines it closely, rather mysterious. The destruction by Lady Burne-Jones of a great part of her correspondence with Morris is suspect in more than one respect, and the nature of their relationship is not altogether clear. Morris's friendship and admiration for Burne-Jones were total and, it seems, blind. He flew into mad rages if anyone criticised him in his presence.<sup>8</sup> He remained faithful despite their complete political disagreement from 1883 on.<sup>9</sup> Possibly Morris did not realise that his own development, even in the field of art, was taking him a very long way away from the position which Burne-Jones still kept, and we may wonder if this continued collaboration was not, in the long run, a handicap: to my way of thinking it has confused the real image of Morris in the eyes of the public. In due course we shall see how the human and material pictures in *News from Nowhere* no longer had anything in common with the Pre-Raphaelite style: neither Ellen nor Clara could be imagined on the canvases of Burne-Jones or Rossetti.

If, in 1880, Morris, speaking of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, still called them "my masters", their chief merit in his eyes lay in having restored the link with mediaeval art, in having "caught up the golden chain dropped two hundred years ago" and yet more in having spread "discontent at the ignoble ugliness that surrounds them".<sup>10</sup> He sharpened and developed these ideas in 1891 in a lecture which he gave in Birmingham upon Pre-Raphaelite painting.<sup>11</sup> It is noticeable that his tone has become more detached. He speaks of it in the past and as something outside himself. He sees in the movement "a portion of the general revolt against Academicism in Literature as well as Art" and considers it to be "a branch of the great Gothic art which once pervaded all Europe". He praises it for its rediscovery of the ancient qualities of naturalism, of narrative expression and of decoration. However, this same lecture allows doubts to show through. It was a weakness he asserts, to have abjured any representation of contemporary reality and to have taken refuge only in the evocation of the past, even though the ugliness of the age fully justified such escapism. But he stands even further apart when, coming to more general considerations in the full development of his thought, he declares to his listeners that it is impossible to re-do the work of the past, and that tradition is without value unless it helps us to create something new. In an article which appeared in 1884,<sup>12</sup> he asserted that it was in plunging into the mediaeval tradition that the Pre-Raphaelites had done original work. His 1891 lecture did not renew this assertion, and the generalised judgment which Morris then uttered leaves the point indeterminate.

In the field of historical thinking, the most real and characteristic thing which our poet owed to Pre-Raphaelitism was not just the exaltation of mediaeval art (that he had already rediscovered), but above all the consequent condemnation of all artistic production since the Renaissance. Holman Hunt, the theoretician of the movement, had long attacked the decay of painting from the generation after Raphael up to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who became the favourite target for vituperation. Graham Hough strangely points out about this that Ruskin, the leader of thought and the protector of the Brotherhood, was, in his turn, influenced by it. In the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*, his references to Raphael are always respectful, and it is only in the third volume, published in 1856, that he follows his disciples in discovering the poison introduced by the corruption and pride of the Renaissance.<sup>13</sup>

In truth, this particular debt goes further back, long before Pre-Raphaelitism had yet played the rôle of conveyor belt. In 1847 Rossetti had acquired for ten shillings a book of manuscripts (prose, verse and drawings) by William Blake, and subsequently had assisted Gilchrist in the compilation of his biography. Blake's epigrams and jeers are contemptuous about Correggio, Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt, Reynolds and Gainsborough, and there seems little doubt that they helped form the beliefs of the young group. And, again, was it not Blake who had written, with a turn of phrase already typically Ruskinian: "Grecian is Mathematical Form: Goth is Living Form"?<sup>14</sup> There is nothing to give us the measure of Morris's knowledge, at this stage, of Blake's work and thought. Perhaps he was mainly responsive to his graphic art. In any case, we can find no earlier allusion than 1880, and then it is only to praise the limpidity, the purity, the simplicity of his language after the pretentious jargon of the versifiers of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The chronology of the references leads us to suppose that he must have reread him in 1884, at the start of his life as a militant. His admiration was first aesthetic. He marvelled at "the almost miraculous phenomenon of a painter of that period who had a real and strange genius for the decorative or beautiful side of the art", and who, "visionary as he was understood not only the power of words in verse but also the power of form and colour to delight the eye at the same time that it exalts the mind".<sup>16</sup> Gradually his interest turned to the poetry rather than the engraving, and again it was in order to set it against that of the classical age. Blake is the first, he writes, "who drew English poetry from the slough of conventional twaddle in which the eighteenth century had sunk it; and visionary as he was, he was able to look at realities, and to make his words mean something". It is in these terms that he presented *The Little Vagabond* to the readers of *Commonweal*,<sup>17</sup> so his attention had turned to the social aspects of Blake's work, to the denunciations of poverty and hypocrisy, as is indicated by the later publication in the columns of his weekly, of *London*,<sup>18</sup> of *Auguries of Innocence*<sup>19</sup> and of *Holy Thursday*.<sup>20</sup> But it does not appear that Morris was aware of Blake's utopian efforts or followed him in his abortive quest for a new Jerusalem. He cites him among his favourite authors in his reply to the *Pall Mall Gazette* enquiry, but adds after his name: "the part of him which a mortal can understand".<sup>21</sup> He was put off by the complexity of the prophetic books and also, possibly, by the religious and metaphysical forms of his millenarianism.



## 2. William Cobbett

Conversely, his robust appetite for the things of this world made him unreservedly receptive to the fiery prose of William Cobbett. According to E. P. Thompson, he seems to have come into contact with his works in 1882 and to have delved extensively into them during the following year.<sup>22</sup> However, I have found a use of Cobbett's contemptuous epithet for London, "the Wen", in a talk given by Morris in 1881.<sup>23</sup> It is somewhat surprising that these readings should have come so late, for they were well calculated to please him. Cobbett rapidly became one of the classics read aloud in the family circle and Morris was sufficiently fond of him to forgive the disdainful judgments he had often passed on corners of England dear to the poet. He never stopped recommending the reading of *Cottage Economy*, *Advice to Young Men* and, above all, of *Rural Rides*, which he knew by heart, if one is to believe Mackail.<sup>24</sup> No doubt he read other books, and probably a certain number of brochures and pamphlets taken from the *Political Register*. This seems to emerge from a letter of 1883, in which he writes "such queer things they are, but plenty of stuff in them".<sup>25</sup> His impetuous temperament was bound to be captivated by the aggressive verve and the rustic radicalism of the man Coleridge called the rhinoceros of politics, whom Heine regarded as the English bulldog, who himself took the pseudonym of Porcupine and who became for Morris "the master of plain-speaking".<sup>26</sup> There is evidence to indicate that the polemical style of many of the articles published in *Commonweal* is deliberately modelled upon Cobbett's style.

Did he read *A History of the Protestant Reformation*, which is Cobbett's great contribution to the mediaevalism of the nineteenth century? I would not venture to assert this with Professor Le Mire's confidence,<sup>27</sup> because Morris never mentions it. In truth the question is not very important, because the main ideas developed in it reappear scattered through *Rural Rides*. Cobbett's point of departure was his desire to reply to the campaign carried on across the country against the emancipation of the Catholics. Basing his ideas upon the works of the historian Lingard, but demonstrating much less circumspection in his judgments, Cobbett saw in the Reformation the source of all the evils that were rife in his own time. Relying, like many another of his contemporaries, upon the methods of contrasts, he set against the England of barracks, of fiscal structure, of Poor Law and prisons, the mediaeval England of convents, hospitals, guilds and houses of charity:

"Monks and nuns, who *fed the poor*, were better than sinecure and pension men and women, who *feed upon the poor*." <sup>28</sup>

He insists at length and many times over upon the rôle played by the monastic communities and upon the fact that, thanks to them, pauperism was unknown for centuries. Morris, less responsive to the religious aspect of the problem, no doubt paid attention to the picture Cobbett painted of conditions of life in the Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup> This explicit refusal to regard history as a succession of reigns and wars, and the desire to find out, above all, how the people lived, "comparing the then price of labour with the then price of food",<sup>30</sup> provided him with material for fruitful thought. Sometimes relying upon figures and often, also, upon the resources of his style and argument,



Cobbett showed that England was then the "land of roast beef" before being transformed by the Reformation into a "land of dry bread and oatmeal porridge": even the bread finally had to give way to the potato, just as the invigorating mug of beer was to be replaced by the cup of tea, the mother of all vices.<sup>31</sup> Not only were the pre-Reformation English better fed, better clothed and better housed, but they enjoyed greater freedom. What, in fact, were the vassalage and serfdom of the feudal régime in comparison with the lot of industrial workers "compelled to work fourteen hours a day, in a heat of eighty-four degrees; and who are liable to punishment for looking out at a window of the factory"?<sup>32</sup>

Cobbett vehemently rejects the idea that the population figures for nineteenth-century England were higher than they had been in the Middle Ages. The opposite is true, he claims, and needs no more proof than the number and size of the churches built everywhere to accommodate the many more parishioners than the locality now possesses.<sup>33</sup> Abbeys, monasteries, and cathedrals bear witness to the prosperity of mediaeval England. They were built at a time when there were no poor and no poor-rates, "when every labouring man was clothed in good woollen cloth; and when all had plenty of meat and bread and beer". And that is why the construction of such buildings is impossible today.<sup>34</sup> Those who built them strove in exemplary fashion, "to make the country beautiful, to make it an object of pride with the people, and to make the nation truly and permanently great".<sup>35</sup> Modern man is filled with a sense of inferiority "upon merely beholding the remains of their efforts to ornament their country and elevate the minds of the people". If, he adds,

"in all that they have left us, we see that they surpassed us, why are we to conclude, that they did not surpass us in all other things worthy of admiration?"<sup>36</sup>

For my part, he says again,

"I could not look up at the spire and the whole of the church at Salisbury, without feeling that I lived in degenerate times. Such a thing could never be made now."<sup>37</sup>

Before speaking contemptuously of the "dark ages", one should compare such monuments with "that great, heavy, ugly, unmeaning mass of stone called St. Paul's".<sup>38</sup>

This impetuous rehabilitation of the Middle Ages is quite closely linked with other themes which are, also, constantly recurring with Morris. I would like to be able to go on quoting at greater length (but it would mean departing from the line I have laid down) from Cobbett's thundering invective against Parliament and the parties wrangling over power and sinecures: these pages are masterpieces of English prose, and here the master leaves the disciple standing.<sup>39</sup> Another idea frequently expressed is of more direct interest to us, because it plays an important part in Morris's utopian economy, and that is the need to have done with the middlemen and parasites. Concerning the first, the similarity is particularly striking. We will pass over generalities on the subject of

"those locusts, called middle-men, who create nothing, who add to the value of nothing, who improve nothing, but who live in idleness, and who live well, too, out of the labour of the producer and the consumer".

But here is something more interesting, because we find clearly defined the mediaeval origin of an idea dear to Morris:

"The fair and the market, those wise institutions of our forefathers, and with regard to management of which they were so scrupulously careful . . . bring the producer and the consumer in contact with each other . . . The fair and the market bring them together, and enable them to act for their mutual interest and convenience. The shop and the trafficker keeps them apart; the shop hides from both producer and consumer the real state of matters. The fair and the market lay everything open . . ."<sup>40</sup>

In Morris's utopia, where cash relationships no longer intrude, this human contact between producer and consumer is an important element of the new brotherhood. The denunciation of parasitism is made by Morris as sharply as by Cobbett. With the latter, it is true, it has an individual and systematic twist. The major evil is the national debt, and he uses the term "Dead Weight" for the band of parasites who live upon it, at the expense of working taxpayers. The term embraces

"twenty thousand parsons, more than twenty thousands stock-brokers and stock-jobbers perhaps; forty or fifty thousand tax gatherers; thousands upon thousands of military and naval officers in full pay",

to whom are added the swarms of military pensioners and their beneficiaries.<sup>41</sup> It is "an accursed system that takes the food from those that raise it, and gives it to those who do nothing that is useful to man".<sup>42</sup> It has even brought into being dynasties of parasites, passing pensions and sinecures from father to son.<sup>43</sup> As Morris was to do, Cobbett links the idea of parasitism with that of ugliness and physical degeneration. What is a watering place? It is, he writes,

"a place to which East India plunderers, West India floggers, English tax-gorgers, and debauchees of all descriptions, female as well as male, resort, at the suggestion of silently laughing quacks, in the hope of getting rid of the bodily consequences of their manifold sins and iniquities. When I enter a place like this I always feel disposed to squeeze up my nose with my fingers."<sup>44</sup>

He particularly resents the army, "that the Government pays with our money".<sup>45</sup> If one recalls that it then performed the functions of a repressive police force against popular movements, Cobbett's reflection goes a long way:

". . . the whole amount of these poor-rates falls far short of the cost of the standing army in time of peace! So that, take away this army, which is to keep the distressed people from committing acts of violence, and you have, at once, ample means of removing all the distress and all the danger of acts of violence!"<sup>46</sup>

Another class of parasites for whom Cobbett has a sharp tooth is the clergy, whom he vehemently reproaches for becoming rich with the tithes which were intended in the Middle Ages to help the needy and which must one day revert, along with all the property of the Church, to the community.<sup>47</sup> If at least, he

adds, the clergy did a useful job in devoting their enormous leisure to writing the histories of their respective parishes, the evil would be lessened.<sup>48</sup>

To the parasitism of the rich is added the equally artificial parasitism of the poor. Farmers lack the means to pay day-labourers to do essential work, but have to pay rates enabling the parish councils to employ these unemployed labourers digging holes one day and filling them the next, or levelling roads so that the bile of parasites stuffed with food should not be disturbed by jolting.<sup>49</sup> The same misuse of labour-power is represented by the construction of useless and unproductive barracks.<sup>50</sup> Like Morris later, Cobbett was indignant at the anarchy and injustice of the allocation of work.

Another aspect of the mess is the dread of the overproduction of commodities on the pretext that it lowers the price, when millions of workers are too poor to acquire them.<sup>51</sup> But it is these same economists and "feelosofers" who, following Malthus, fear an overpopulation of workers consuming all the foodstuffs, when everything indicates that the national product is capable of supporting a number three to ten times greater than the number of producers.<sup>52</sup> If there is overpopulation, it is of parasites, encouraged by the system of pensions.<sup>53</sup> Cobbett's indignation is expressed in terms that must have appealed to Morris:

"To suppose such a thing possible as a Society, in which men, who are able and willing to work, cannot support their families, and ought, with a great part of the women, to be *compelled* to a life of celibacy, for fear of having children to be starved; to suppose such a thing possible is monstrous. But, if there be such a Society, every one will say, that it ought instantly to be dissolved; because a state of nature would be far preferable to it."<sup>54</sup>

Such language must have found an echo in Morris's mind at the time when he was seeking the antithesis of "civilization" in a social state capable of reconciling "barbarism" with socialism.

The parasite overpopulation has arisen, in Cobbett's eyes, through the monstrous growth of big cities and especially of London, the *Wen*. This word, "the *Wen*", studs all his writing and Morris takes it up untiringly. The Malthusians, writes Cobbett, "never say a word about the too great population of the *Wen*; nor about that of Liverpool, Manchester, Cheltenham, and the like!"<sup>55</sup>

"... formerly the people were pretty evenly spread over the country, instead of being, as the greater part of them are now, collected together in great masses, where, for the greater part, the idlers live on the labour of the industrious."<sup>56</sup>

The latter see the product of their labour transferred there "to fatten those who live in these new houses".<sup>57</sup> The horror he feels at it makes Cobbett prophetic:

"*Dispersed* this *Wen* must be, mind, by *some means or other*! This must happen at last ... Of the million and a half people who are drawn together here, more than a million have no business here. They have been drawn here by unnatural causes. They must and they will be scattered."<sup>58</sup>



Parasitism and urban concentration have contributed to removing men from that healthy "state of nature" which existed in the Middle Ages. One of the signs of that degeneration appears in the growing acceptance of the adulteration of foodstuffs, particularly beer and bread,<sup>59</sup> and Morris later outbids Cobbett in his denunciation of the use of substitutes.<sup>60</sup> One is struck, too, by the similarity between their likes and dislikes. Both of them, passionately devoted to the English land and countryside, protest at the pollarding of trees. Cobbett, for example, will laud the beauty of the country between Worth and Tunbridge Wells where "nobody is so beastly as to trim trees up like the elms near the Wen".<sup>61</sup> He feels the same horror as Morris at the modern craze for travel for travel's sake:

"... the facilities, which now exist of moving human bodies from place to place, are among the curses of the country, the destroyers of industry, of morals, and, of course, of happiness. It is a great error to suppose, that people are rendered stupid by remaining always in the same place."<sup>62</sup>

There is another subject upon which one remarks a notable similarity of outlook, that of education. Here the influence of Cobbett is obvious. The same condemnation, perhaps less qualified than with Morris, of the public schools and universities, which produce nothing but milksops and frivolous idiots.<sup>63</sup> Oxford and Cambridge are institutions devised to develop a class spirit above all else, for there one finds

"both precept and example for all that is servile towards the powerful and all that is insolent and cruel towards the weak."<sup>64</sup>

The education dispensed in all the schools has the sole objective of preparing the children of the rich "to live, in some way or other, upon the labour of other people", and to inculcate into the poor "the rudiments of servility, pauperism and slavery".<sup>65</sup> The teaching methods are odious. "What are called the *learned* languages operate as a bar to the acquirement of real learning",<sup>66</sup> and, in a more general way,

"it is no small mischief to a boy, that many of the best years of his life should be devoted to the learning of what can never be of real use to any human being. His mind is necessarily rendered frivolous by the long habit of attaching importance to *words* instead of *things*; to *sound* instead of *sense*".<sup>67</sup>

What seems to Cobbett to be no less serious is that the study is generally premature and takes no account of the child's natural development. It is "the spoiling of the mind by forcing on it thoughts which it is not fit to receive". It is unreasonable to try to "put old heads on young shoulders . . . The mind, as well as the body, requires time to come to its strength". The only way to encourage its progress is to give "to the body good and plentiful food, sweet air and abundant exercise". The first objective should be the happiness of the child, and "book learning, if it tend to militate against this, ought to be disregarded".<sup>68</sup> Preceding Morris, he thinks that for him salvation lies in rejection: "It has always been observed of these schools that the most indolent and restive boys turn out to be the brightest men".<sup>69</sup> Finally there is no need for schools or masters. Scolding and driving are quite useless for giving

children a desire to read, write and love books.<sup>70</sup> Reading itself should not be unduly encouraged, for in excess it favours idleness and pretension.<sup>71</sup> The only discipline suited to the child is to get up early and take part in manual labour in the open air.<sup>72</sup> All these ideas are found again in Morris, but, while Cobbett confines himself to harsh criticism of book learning, Morris, though certainly in an inadequate and clumsy way because of the influence of his predecessor, has the merit of approaching the problem from the angle of the unity of human activity within the diversity of occupation.<sup>73</sup>

It is plain that mediaevalism is only one of the aspects of Cobbett's ideology appealing to Morris. In conclusion, it does not seem inappropriate to me to consider that ideology as a whole; on the one hand because it has much in common with the ideas of other *laudatores temporis acti* who inspired Morris, and, on the other, because, despite evident borrowings, we shall in this way better assess all that separates the two men.

Like the Christian socialists, like Carlyle, like Ruskin, Cobbett was far from being a revolutionary. He was at once Radical and Tory, like so many social writers of the nineteenth century. Their fundamental motivation was a hatred of utilitarianism, of rapacious individualism, of *laissez-faire*. But they condemned these things in the name of the past and denounced Whig industrialism in the name of a traditional order. Certainly, Cobbett's Radicalism could go a long way. He applauded the French Revolution and considered that England made war on France "to prevent the disembarkation, not of Frenchmen, but of French principles". Looking more closely, Jacobinism for him nevertheless comes down to the absence of rotten boroughs and the suppression of ecclesiastical tithes.<sup>74</sup> He was filled with a sincere love of the people, above all the workers in the fields, the chief victims of the National Debt and the parasite system; he waxed indignant at the contempt showered upon them and the names with which they were labelled (the Populace, the Rabble, the Mob, the Swinish Multitude);<sup>75</sup> he protested against repressive police measures taken against them and the disproportionate punishments meted out to them for the crime of poaching;<sup>76</sup> he saw them abandoned by those who should have been their natural support and thought somewhat fearfully, that the only hope for an adjustment in the State could come from them alone.<sup>77</sup> The religious propaganda spread among them by the moneyed class could only encourage hypocrisy.<sup>78</sup> It was itself hypocrisy:

"As an ailing carcass engenders vermin, a pauperized community engenders teachers of fanaticism, the very foundation of whose doctrines is, that we are to care nothing about this world, and that all our labours and exertions are in vain."<sup>79</sup>

If one wants him to live morally,

"the labourer must have his belly full and be free from fear; and this belly full must come to him out of his wages, and not from benevolence of any description".<sup>80</sup>

William Morris more than once paid tribute to this sturdy materialistic conception of human progress and even found in it the justification for workers' struggles.<sup>81</sup>

But that was a paraphrase probably exceeding Cobbett's intentions. His

Radicalism had serious limits. If he passionately defended the agricultural workers, he sympathised just as much with the farmers and even landed proprietors whom he tried to rally against the domination of the earth by the moneyed bourgeoisie. Much more, he respected the ancient nobility and declared that "we should lose more than we should gain by getting rid of our aristocracy".<sup>82</sup> His social ideals remained somewhat confused. In some remarks of unexpected boldness he went so far as to say:

"... in the public property we see the suitable thing. And who can possibly object to this, except those, who, amongst them, now divide the possession or benefit of this property?"<sup>83</sup>

But that was just a sort of outburst with no morrow. It seems to us that the depths of his thought were more clearly shown when he wrote:

"The land, the trees, the fruits, the herbage, the roots are, by the law of nature, the common possession of all the people . . . Before the Social Compact existed, there were no sufferers from *helplessness*. The possession of everything being in common, every man was able, by extraordinary exertion, to provide for his helpless kindred and friends by the means of those exertions . . . And when he agreed to allow of proprietorship, he understood, of course, that the helpless were, in case of need, to be protected and fed by the proprietors."<sup>84</sup>

Common property was, then, less for him a dream of the future than nostalgia for a "state of nature" which he agrees cannot return. But his gaze remained fixed upon a mediaeval past when feudal relationships were hierarchic and humane. Despite the thunderous roll of his invective, the reforms he proposed were remarkably moderate:

"The *remedy* . . . consists wholly and solely of such a *reform* in the Commons' or People's House of Parliament, as shall give to every payer of *direct taxes* a vote at the elections, and as shall cause the Members to be *elected annually*."<sup>85</sup>

One should not be surprised that the mountain brought forth a mouse. Obsessed by the National Debt, the source, in his eyes, of all evil, Cobbett never for one moment suspected the mechanisms of production relationships or the exploitation of labour, either in the countryside or the factory.<sup>86</sup> Society, as he saw it, is divided into two classes:

"the idlers living chiefly on the taxes, in one way or another, and the industrious, who have their earnings taken from them to maintain the idlers".<sup>87</sup>

So, it will be enough to abolish the National Debt to restore social justice: a parliament elected by all tax-payers will provide for it. As for the rest, nothing is to be touched.

"We want *great alterations*", proclaims Cobbett, "but we want *nothing new*. Alteration, modification to suit the time and circumstances; but the great principles ought to be, and must be, the same, or else confusion will follow."<sup>88</sup>



These great principles, which he hardly defines, seem to be, in his mind, those of pre-Reformation England. Despite the following he was at times able to attract, this free lance was never able to master his individualistic temperament and carry out a consistent and co-ordinated action. Enthusiastic though William Morris was about him, conscious as he was of his debt towards him, he was none the less clear about this. In his theoretical manual of socialism, he praises his "great literary capacity" and admires his having "flashes of insight as to social matters far before his time," but these flashes, he writes, were "clouded by violent irrational prejudices and prodigious egotism": he was "a powerful disruptive agent, but incapable of association with others".<sup>89</sup>

### 3. The Historians

Cobbett's example shows to what extent social thought in the nineteenth century constantly referred to history. Not only did Morris not escape this rule, but perhaps no one more than he had recourse to historical science itself. I do not think it appropriate here to study the use he made of first-hand documents in his mediaeval stories. In Margaret Grennan's remarkable book we find a penetrating analysis of the use he was able to make of ancient chronicles, Froissart's in particular, in *A Dream of John Ball*.<sup>90</sup> What seems more interesting to us is the debt he acknowledged to the historical school of the nineteenth century, from which he acquired certain important aspects of his conception of history.

His reading of historians strengthened his conviction that history was a fundamental science upon which he felt constantly dependent in his thought as in his art. From his Oxford years he had devoted himself "vigorously"<sup>91</sup> to its study. In 1883, at a moment when personal worries were overwhelming him and driving him to gloomy thoughts, the only merit he could find in his earlier poetic works lay in "showing my sympathy with history".<sup>92</sup> He declared to Sydney Cockerell that "whatever study he undertook was interesting only or mainly for the light it threw on history".<sup>93</sup> History literally became a part of his life:

"... what romance means is the capacity for a true conception of history, a power of making the past part of the present. I think that is a very important part of the pleasure in the exercise of the intellectual faculties of mankind which makes the most undeniable part of happiness"

And he added that any disdain of it was no proof of a practical spirit, but a degradation.<sup>94</sup> He rejoiced to observe "that appreciation of history which is a genuine growth of the times".<sup>95</sup> It had become, he wrote, "so earnest a study amongst us as to have given us, as it were, a new sense".<sup>96</sup>

In effect, the very conception of history had been radically transformed:

"Time was, and not so long ago, when the clever essay writer (rather than historian) made his history surrounded by books whose value he weighed rather by the degree in which they conformed to an arbitrary standard of literary excellence, than by any indications they might give of being able to afford a glimpse into the past. So treated, the very books were not capable of yielding the vast stores of knowledge of history which they really possessed, if dealt with by the historical method. It is true that for the most part these books were generally written for other pur-

poses than that of giving simple information to those who came after; at their honestest the writers were compelled to look at life through the spectacles thrust on them by the conventional morality of their own times; at their *dishonestest*, they were servile flatterers in the pay of the powers that were.”<sup>97</sup>

Morris is clearly objecting less to the dull rhetoric than to the misrepresentations and class prejudice. He execrates “the dull gulf of lies, hypocritical concealments and false deductions, which is called bourgeois history”.<sup>98</sup> Such attitudes vitiated the very approach to a study of the past:

“History . . . was once little more than a string of doubtful tales of the bloody wars and unaccountable follies of kings and scoundrels in which the necessary slavery of the people was taken for granted . . .”<sup>99</sup>

Morris had another objection to this history of events, partial in both senses of the word, which exalted the great and ignored the people; it was that it only paid attention to such earlier civilisations as had structures and ideologies inspiring confidence in the established order.

“... academic historians . . . were cursed with a fatal though unconscious dishonesty; the world of history which they pictured to themselves was an unreal one; to them there were but two periods of continuous order, of organized life: the period of Greek and Roman classical history was one, the time from the development of the retrospection into that period till their own days was the other. All else to them was a mere accidental confusion.”<sup>100</sup>

Morris makes these criticisms in general terms, and only rarely takes up the cudgels against some particular historian. Among the exceptions, we will take the case of Gibbon for whom he had, moreover, a great admiration and whom he re-read to the end of his life.<sup>101</sup> He holds it against him that he looked less to the lot of the people than to the doings and deeds of “kings and scoundrels”,<sup>102</sup> and still more that he imagined that the society of the eighteenth century was “eternal, or as long lived rather . . . as the world”,<sup>103</sup> and that it was safe from any reversion to barbarism: the concept of barbarism was evidently, for Morris, very different in its content from what it might be for the author of *The Decline and Fall*. At bottom these various complaints expressed unyielding opposition to the ideology of the Enlightenment and to its speculative and abstract humanism.

In another case, in a very incidental but also very significant way, Morris takes to task his contemporary Froude. In many respects we might say that Froude is an anti-Cobbett, on account of his virulent hatred of Papacy and his extreme exaltation of the Reformation. A dominant feature of his work is his exaggerated apologia for the part played by Henry VIII; he justifies all his mistakes and even all his tyranny, including the plundering of the monasteries and the execution of Thomas More. A faithful disciple of Carlyle, whose biography he was to write later, he pushes the cult of the hero to the point of regarding the people as insignificant, giving them very little place in his picture of the sixteenth century. That is just what Morris accuses him of when he refers to the growing impoverishment of the peasants, driven from their lands and hanged in thousands “by Mr. Froude’s pious hero, Henry VIII”.<sup>104</sup>

Although a contemporary, Froude represented a very different tendency from that of the Oxford School,<sup>105</sup> whose work aroused Morris's admiration and inspired his utopian thinking about the Middle Ages. In 1877 he was proposing the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in the name of "the newly invented study of living history",<sup>106</sup> and to the end of his life he rejoiced that in his time "history is studied so keenly through genuine original documents", thus acquiring extraordinary vitality.<sup>107</sup> Since 1830, in fact, the science of history had been transformed and given new life, thanks to the publication of an enormous mass of archives, chronicles and documents:

"... history has been illuminated ... by careful research: we have counted our forefathers' pots and kettles and chairs and pictures, we know what their clothes and their houses were; we have read not only their books, but their family letters, their bills and their contracts, in short we have followed them from the church, the battlefield, and the palace to their houses and workshops and tilled fields, and we find that these men of the same blood as ourselves, speaking the same tongue, connected with us by an apparently unbroken chain of laws, traditions, and customs, were yet amazingly different from ourselves." <sup>109</sup>

Thus was shattered to pieces the myth of eternal man, so dear to the philosophers of the Enlightenment. All these facts "ignored by the historians of the eighteenth century, have been laid open to our view by our modern school of evolutionary historians".<sup>110</sup> Drawing aside the curtains hiding the Middle Ages has given us back the logic and continuity of history and made it possible for us to explore the future rationally:

"... a new science grew up, almost a new sense one may say, and real living history became possible to us; not a dry string of annals, not a mere series of brilliant essays or comparisons between the past and the present; but a definite insight into the life of the bygone ages founded on a laborious and patient sifting of truth from hearsay; the story of the past I say became possible for us to read, and we began to see why we are placed as we are at present, and whitherward we are tending." <sup>111</sup>

This new concept is due to "the researches and labours of enlightened historians in recent times, such as Hallam in the early part of the century, and, of late years, of men like Green, Freeman, and Stubbs".<sup>112</sup> Hallam (*A View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, 1818) played a pioneering rôle. More jurist than artist, he concentrated mainly on the history of institutions, and his sententious tone is sometimes offputting. But he had an insatiable curiosity and was not uninterested in any detail; yet he maintained a remarkable sense of synthesis. He had the considerable merit, in Morris's eyes, of drawing attention to the importance of domestic architecture. Sweeping away the legends created by a mass of romantic literature, he brought out the simplicity of customs which obtained at all levels of society, even among the feudal nobility: here, no doubt, is where one should look for the origin of Morris's idealisation of the Middle Ages where the separation of the classes of society held nothing scandalous. Finally, above all, taking Cobbett's concerns upon his own shoulders, but putting them on a scientific basis, Hallam established accurate-



ly that the consumption of meat was sensibly higher than in the nineteenth century and that the purchasing power of the mediaeval workman was much greater than that of the modern worker.

Morris's debt to Stubbs (*Constitutional History of Mediaeval England*, 1874-78), "the greatest historian of his time", according to G. P. Gooch,<sup>113</sup> is more difficult to define. He also concentrated mainly upon the history of institutions, but, with incomparable mastery, he made it dependent upon economic, political and military conditions, with a steady regard for objectivity and reference to first-hand documents. It is an odd fact that he seems to have influenced Morris by the things that later criticism has found questionable, namely, his tendency to exaggerate the importance and the maturity of mediaeval parliamentarianism and, especially, to consider Magna Carta as a popular victory rather than that of the barons anxious to safeguard their privileges. On the other hand, Morris owes to him the fundamental notion of the survival, in the feudal institutions, of the heritage of the customs of the Germanic tribes.

This democratic Teutonism is, after all, a distinctive feature of the Oxford School and is expressed with more vigour, if not so much caution, by Freeman and Green, whom Morris seems to have consulted more than Stubbs and whom he cites as examples of the new science of history.<sup>114</sup> It is, he writes, "the school of historical criticism of our own days" that has revealed the egalitarian tendencies which were so much alive in the Middle Ages.<sup>115</sup> Freeman (*The History of the Norman Conquest*, 1867-79) was a militant Radical, moved by a propagandist spirit. He constantly laid stress upon the popular nature of English institutions before the Conquest, and he too insisted that they survived through the Middle Ages, despite the Norman intervention, which he regretted as much as Morris; all his sympathies went to the other camp, and he draws an enthusiastic picture of Harold. He was the first English historian to appreciate the importance of an exact knowledge of the places where events happened and of the architectural remains from the past. He certainly helped to develop in Morris his native taste for closely linking geography with history even in anticipation, and his appreciation of Gothic art was expressed in terms which Morris would not have disowned.

Green's *Short History of the English People* (1874), is all the more important a work for having been the first of this kind and because the warmth of its style immediately made it popular. It is generally agreed that the section devoted to mediaeval history is the best and the most appreciated. For Green, more than for earlier historians and even for his contemporaries, the real hero is the people. Kings are relegated to second place, and Chaucer receives more attention than the battle of Crécy. Thanks to him, writes Gooch, "the pyramid which historians had tried to balance on its apex now rests on its base".<sup>116</sup> His frank siding with the people was more attractive to Morris than Stubbs's care for impartiality and the pages devoted to the Peasants' Revolt certainly held his attention. Green is observant of all aspects of daily life and describes them with an imaginative gift which he sometimes perhaps indulged at the expense of exactitude. He shares with Freeman the taste for the geographical account, and was happily skilled in reproducing the Anglo-Saxon and mediaeval landscapes. Finally, like Freeman, he stressed the democratic nature of the ancient institutions of England.

Besides these prominent historians of the Oxford School, whose influence Morris recognised, there is another whom historiography tends to neglect and who played a considerable rôle in the formation of Morris's mediaeval ideology. In 1866, Thorold Rogers had published his *History of Agriculture and Prices in England* and in 1884 appeared the two volumes of *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*. This Oxford professor was a courageous Liberal whom Morris found at his side at the time of the affair of the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria and in the struggle against the Sudanese War.<sup>117</sup> It is probable that the high esteem in which he was held by Karl Marx, who approvingly quotes his theses in *Capital*,<sup>118</sup> increased Morris's interest in his works. We note in this connection that, before the 1914–18 war, these were generally included among the books socialists regarded as essential to their political education.<sup>119</sup>

The influence of Thorold Rogers was exerted upon William Morris in three ways. The author of *A Dream of John Ball* found in this historian a copious documentation of the great Peasants' Revolt. Morris was even led into error by him about the motives of the movement. More recent criticism has proved that there could have been no question of the re-establishment of serfdom on the part of the feudal class,<sup>120</sup> but this mistake led Morris to give a view of the succession of social structures which was certainly too schematic, but more striking and artistically satisfying. In the second place, Rogers appears to have been the first historian to bring out the elements of that "religious socialism" which informed the propaganda of the disciples of Wiclif, and in this way he certainly encouraged Morris to make of John Ball a sort of ideological ancestor, and, more generally, to formulate his theory of a mediaeval communism in a latent state. Finally, and his merit here is incontestable, Thorold Rogers, inspired by Cobbett and Hallam, established a detailed and scientific record of wages and prices through the mediaeval centuries and was thus able to establish that the workers of the Middle Ages had enjoyed a situation of "coarse plenty": "all the necessities of life in ordinary years . . . were abundant and cheap". Their lot was far superior to that of Victorian workers, "whose condition is more destitute, whose homes are more squalid, whose means are more uncertain, whose prospects are more hopeless than those of the poorest serfs of the middle ages and the meanest drudges of the mediaeval cities".<sup>121</sup> Morris had long felt all that Rogers' precise analysis had revealed. This confirmation was precious. Speaking of the mediaeval artisan at an annual conference of the S.P.A.B., he exclaims:

"We who have studied the remains of his handicraft have been, without any further research, long instinctively sure that he was no priest-ridden, down-trodden savage, but a thoughtful and vigorous man, and in some sense, at least, *free*. That instinct has been abundantly confirmed by painstaking collectors of facts, like Mr. Thorold Rogers, and we now know that the guild craftsman led the sort of life in work and play that we should have expected from the art he produced . . . for art, as Mr. Thorold Rogers justly says, was widespread." <sup>122</sup>

#### 4. Christian Socialism

The need for a certain thematic logicity has led me to take a small liberty with chronology. We must now turn back and pass through the

critical sieve all that might remain, at the moment of creation of utopia, of the ideological influences experienced at Oxford. It seems superfluous to linger over a study of the Christian socialism of Maurice and Kingsley. Their influence, certainly that of the latter, was definitely important during the years of youth. Morris willingly recognises it, but he indicates that he owes to these readings "some socio-political ideas which would have developed probably but for the attractions of art and poetry".<sup>123</sup> Which is saying that, twenty-five years later, when he came to public life, this influence had had time to become blurred and be replaced by others. May Morris tells us, too, that while he had once been attracted by Kingsley's writings he came later to detest "the false sentiment and the strained tragedy of him".<sup>124</sup> In the course of his conversations with Sydney Cockerell, Morris once declared that his interest in the Christian socialist movement had, after all, only been, like his interest in Pusey's movement, "a reaction against Puritanism".<sup>125</sup> That is a judicious assessment, which we should not disregard, but it is certainly incomplete, because even if it had no immediate effect, the reading of Maurice and Kingsley revealed to the young student the problem set by the conditions of the workers.

Morris scarcely seems afterwards to have maintained the smallest attachment in this direction and we are a little surprised to see him, in 1883, correspond with C. E. Maurice, the son of Frederick Denison, whom he vainly tried to recruit to the Democratic Federation;<sup>126</sup> we do not know the nature of their relationship, which does not appear to have been kept up after this fruitless attempt. In the field of ideas, what remains of this youthful contact? Really very little, I believe. Morris, so interested in co-operative solutions, never makes the slightest reference to the abortive utopian experiments undertaken by the Christian socialists,<sup>127</sup> which, nevertheless, must have inspired that of Ruskin, when he founded his St. George's Guild. Perhaps, on the other hand, there is in Morris a memory of a certain vocabulary relating to the unity of Heaven and Earth and human fellowship to be found in *A Dream of John Ball*. Above all there remains the respect which he retained for the good faith and disinterest of the representatives of this ideology. This sentiment is certainly in line with his rejection of all sectarianism towards religion, and, at the limit, it could be the origin of his idea of the absorption of Christian values into the materialistic morality of utopian society. In the political field, on the other hand, Morris makes a clean break with the Christian socialists as with all his other forerunners and sources of inspiration, rejecting their Tory Radicalism which bases social progress upon the goodwill of an aristocracy whose authority is justified by birth.

For the rest, it is quite certain that one finds scattered through Kingsley's abundant works ideas that recur with Morris: denunciation of the division of labour, the need to restore the unity of town and country, etc. . . But had Morris read these pages and did he not find the same ideas in other thinkers who were much more familiar to him? However, on one precise point Kingsley's paternity is undeniable: it is the use of the expression "cheap and nasty", which Morris borrowed from the



well-known pamphlet *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, in which the author of *Alton Locke* pilloried the exploitation of home tailors. For Morris, the words describe the shoddy stuff of the poor which, together with the costly trivialities made for the rich, will finally disappear from production in communist society. But if Morris made an original use of this borrowing, he was not alone in so doing. The expression had become so commonplace in the nineteenth-century literature that one may even wonder whether it was a direct borrowing.

### 5. Carlyle

The preaching of the Christian socialists was largely inspired by the message of Carlyle, which Morris also had encountered with enthusiasm during the Oxford years. If he had quickly lost sight of the former, he had, on the contrary, followed with interest the writings of the prophet of Chelsea and continued to show a certain attachment to him. It is customary in most studies to establish a spiritual descent Carlyle-Ruskin-Morris. I shall respect the custom during my analysis, while introducing reservations to which textual study has brought me.

It does not appear that Morris ever met Carlyle,<sup>128</sup> and we do not know what the latter thought of him. Ruskin must certainly have spoken to the Master about the merits of the poet, since he offered him a dedicated copy of *The Earthly Paradise* that can still be seen at Carlyle House in Cheyne Walk. There was however, one circumstance, which oddly, and in an indirect way, put the two men in touch. When, in 1877, Morris founded the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, he was insistent that Carlyle should be one of the sponsors, and we catch him red-handed, compromising, for the only time in his life, I believe. He who hated the architecture of the classical period, who detested Wren and St. Paul's Cathedral, agreed, in order to inveigle Carlyle, to carry on a campaign against the destruction of the City churches built by Wren. Not only did he allow his friend De Morgan to negotiate the matter in these terms, but he wrote to the press and spoke at the first meeting of the "Anti-Scrape", lauding the genius of Wren, "the greatest English architect".<sup>129</sup> This was really going a very long way, and shows the respect which Morris still felt for Carlyle at the time.

Which of his works (which he mentions among his favourite reading)<sup>130</sup> did he know? In 1853, he was reading *Past and Present*, then considered by the young students of his circle "as inspired and absolute truth".<sup>131</sup> In 1856, he founded *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which flourished for a whole year and contains various articles (written, incidentally, not by him but by his collaborators) dealing both with *Chartism* and *Sartor Resartus*. Later he praised the excellent art and power of expression of the latter book which set it above many others, notably, the *History of Frederick II of Prussia*, which he found extremely dull.<sup>132</sup> We know from the memoirs of Cormell Price quoted by Lady Burne-Jones in her *Memorials* that in 1855 he had read *The French Revolution*.<sup>133</sup> To tell the truth, Morris makes only one reference to it, in the theoretical treatise drawn up by himself and Bax in collaboration, and that brief phrase might well have been written by the latter rather than by him. While he might believe with Carlyle that the lot of the workers had improved under the Terror

thanks to the law of maximum, he would not have thought their lot better than it had ever been before: that would have been a denial of his whole mediaevalist faith.<sup>134</sup> Had he read *Heroes and Hero-Worship*? It is possible, since he constantly jeers at the cult of the hero, but as the theme constantly recurs in all Carlyle's work, it is by no means certain. Finally, we know that in 1881, after the great man's death, he read the *Reminiscences* and, in 1882, the biography Froude devoted to him, and that it interested him "in spite of Froude".<sup>135</sup> For the other works, we are reduced to conjecture.

From a close examination of all these writings, several conclusions derive which I find it convenient to state without further delay, however clumsy the procedure may appear. First, that the essence of the influence exerted by Carlyle upon Morris was of a critical order: it was in *Past and Present* that our poet first encountered the denunciation of bourgeois society. Also, in the same book he found a clear picture of mediaeval society based upon the consideration of human relationships. On the other hand, neither in *Past and Present* nor in any other of Carlyle's works is there any definite proposition which could have inspired Morris's utopia. Very much to the contrary; Morris's humanism was plainly and flatly opposed to Carlyle's ideas.

The social criticism of the Scottish prophet deserves our brief consideration, despite the limitations I have imposed upon myself. In fact it was decisive, not only as the starting point of Morris's political thought but also as the motive force of all social thought in nineteenth-century England. For depth of analysis, however, there is nothing remarkable about it; in fact its shallowness is surprising. His merit lies in having found, in striking style, formulations which straightway gripped the imaginations of his contemporaries, and their rumbling repetition was obsessive. The central theme, that of the "cash nexus", payment in cash as the sole link between men in a society devoted to the worship of Mammon, is too well known for us to have need for quotations. It rang through all the literature of the last century and one even finds it in *The Communist Manifesto*, despite the bitter criticism of Carlyle and feudal socialism which Marx and Engels made there. This theme is constantly linked to the denunciation of the economic dogmas of supply and demand and *laissez-faire*, dear to the Manchester School, and of their political expression in parliamentary Whiggism. Morris saw in Carlyle and Ruskin the first two great champions in the fight against "the measureless power of Whiggery" and recognised in them the guides who rallied him to the fight.<sup>136</sup> However, let us note that in these tirades against *laissez-faire* Carlyle is already showing the cloven hoof when he thinks that this official doctrine is "as good as an abdication on the part of the governors" and that it constitutes "an admission that they are henceforth incompetent to govern, that they are not there to govern at all".<sup>137</sup> The attack against economic liberalism is launched not in the name of public interest, but in that of an authoritarianism whose form we shall examine further on. 'This liberalism is an unworthy anarchy setting overproduction against poverty: "millions of shirts, and empty pairs of breeches, hang there in judgment against you."'<sup>138</sup>

Carlyle characterises this tragic contradiction by making use of the myth of Midas:

"With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows; wav-

ing with yellow harvests, thick-studded with workshops, industrial implements, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the strongest, the cunningest and the willingest our Earth ever had: these men are here; the work they have done, the fruit they have realised is here, abundant, exuberant on every hand of us: and behold, some baleful fiat as of Enchantment has gone forth, saying, "Touch it not, ye workers, ye master-workers, ye master-idlers; none of you can touch it, no man of you shall be the better for it, this is enchanted fruit!"<sup>139</sup>

The memory of this allegory must have been lingering with Morris when he wrote:

"The world had to learn another lesson; it had to gain power, and not be able to use it; to gain riches, and to starve upon them like Midas on his gold . . . in a word, to be so eager to gather the results of the deeds of the life of man that it must forget the life of man itself."<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, Carlyle's accounts of working-class poverty are very sketchy. One has a strong feeling that knowledge of the industrial proletariat is a long way off, and there is a striking contrast between these powerful but vague tirades and the extraordinary documentation that Engels was publishing in the same years. We must recognise that we are dealing with a visionary genius, capable of converting an odd news item into as shattering a parable as that of the Irish Widow.<sup>141</sup> But let us be on our guard all the same: Carlyle's preoccupation is much less social than moral. It is that of a Calvinistic bourgeois who does not know what it is to be hungry and who deplores the sight of poverty which he observes to be conducive to a sordid materialism: "We plead and speak, in our Parliaments and elsewhere, not as from the Soul, but from the Stomach", and if we demand free trade, he writes, it is only "that the poorer classes, who are terribly ill-off at present, may have cheaper New-Orleans bacon".<sup>142</sup> The social evil in this poverty is not exclusively material:

"It is not to die, or even to die of hunger, that makes a man wretched; many men have died; all men must die – the last exit of us all is in a Fire-Chariot of Pain. But it is to live miserable we know not why."<sup>143</sup>

What man needs is to recover the meaning of life within moral and divine law. Such an attitude, shared by Ruskin, would be inconceivable for Morris. Rather than this phariseism he prefers the solid good sense of Cobbett who sees no human progress except for a mankind that is well fed, well clothed and well housed.

However, this typical Victorian had the merit, in Morris's eyes, of having throughout his works stigmatised the hypocrisy of his own class. In the respectful tone which he still employed in his pre-Marxist years, our poet said in 1880:

"Mr. Thomas Carlyle, who still lives to be the glory of England, has warned you off shams and poured his scorn on cant many a time."<sup>144</sup>

It is noteworthy, in this connection, that Carlyle's fiercest attacks were directed against false religion: his allegory of the Dead Sea Monkeys is



unforgettable.<sup>145</sup> The universe is for him "a cockney nightmare" and Morris clearly hopes that this definition will cease to be current in the new world of his utopia.<sup>146</sup> All these faults, all this degeneracy, are the results of mad materialistic selfishness. The human race has ceased to be a great organic unit. It is fragmented into individuals between whom the division has become such that any communication is impossible:

"Encased each as in his transparent 'ice-palace'; our brother visible in his, making signals and gesticulations to us – visible but forever unattainable: on his bosom we shall never rest, nor he on ours. It was not a God that did this; no!"<sup>147</sup>

Carlyle's God is denied by the industrial age, which destroys the natural contacts existing between men in feudal times:

"all human dues and reciprocities have been fully changed into one great due of cash payment".<sup>148</sup>

Certainly, all these dues and reciprocities were not, in the Middle Ages, founded upon equality; quite the contrary. But it was this hierarchical order of human relationships which, for Carlyle, constituted natural and divine law. It was this order which assured for each individual the entire solidarity of his neighbour:

"Gurth, born thrall of Cedric, it is like, got cuffs as often as pork-parings, if he misdemeaned himself; but Gurth did belong to Cedric; no human creature then went about connected with nobody";

and this feudal aristocracy carried out, in return "whatsoever in the way of governing, of guiding and protecting could be done".<sup>149</sup> Constantly using the device of contrast, dear to his contemporaries, and which Morris used in his turn to set the future against the present as the present against the past, Carlyle compares the merits of "the hard, organic but limited feudal ages" with the feebleness of "the immense industrial ages, as yet all inorganic, and in a quite pulpy condition, requiring desperately to harden themselves into some organism".<sup>150</sup>

In *Past and Present* he sets out to reconstitute for us an exemplary picture of the monastic community of St. Edmundsbury in the twelfth century. To this end he makes use of the chronicle written in Latin by one of monks, Jocelin of Brakelond, which the Camden Society had published in 1840. But, refusing to be held within the confines of dry pedantic erudition, he attempts to show us "men of flesh and blood, made altogether as we are".<sup>151</sup> The resulting analysis is as primitive as that which he applies to the contemporary era, but this part of the book is filled with a lyrical glow to which one can understand Morris's response. The Abbey houses the remains of St. Edmund, a great landowner who lived simply and was "a recognised Farmer's Friend".<sup>152</sup> After the disastrous rule of Abbot Hugo, the monk Samson is chosen by his peers to take over control of the sanctuary. He restores the tottering finances and, through his authority, justness and ability, obtains the obedience and love of all the populace dependent on him.

"Yesterday a poor mendicant, allowed to possess not above two

shillings of money . . . – this man today finds himself a *Dominus Abbas*, mitred Peer of Parliament, Lord of manorhouses, farms, manors and wide lands.”<sup>153</sup>

He is a hero after Carlyle’s heart. To defend the interests of an orphan heiress, he does not hesitate to stand up to Richard Coeur de Lion, who yields, impressed by his manliness, and grants him his friendship.<sup>154</sup> He is a leader and protector and is, in addition, a great builder, of religious edifices as well as of houses and barns.<sup>155</sup> The life of men working in those days was rough, but

“in no time . . . was the lot of those same dumb millions of toilers so entirely unbearable as it is even in the days now passing over us.”<sup>156</sup>

A man like Samson certainly lived in the world among the men dependent upon him, but this was part of his faith and of their religion. That was taken for granted, and had no need of long hypocritical speeches.

“Religion is not a diseased self-introspection, an agonising enquiry . . . Religion lies over them like an all-embracing heavenly canopy, like an atmosphere and life element, which is not spoken of, which in all things is presupposed without speech.”<sup>157</sup>

Such was the natural and divine order, which we had to recover. Carlyle proposes, upon the basis of the past, to “illustrate the present and the future”.<sup>158</sup> But this past must have its real face restored.

“To predict the future, to manage the present, would not be so impossible, had not the past been so sacrilegiously mishandled; effaced, and what is worse, defaced!”<sup>159</sup>

Let man return to the law of God and of Nature, and “their acted history will then again be a heroism; their written history, what it once was, an epic”.<sup>160</sup> In any case we cannot go on living as we do at present.

“There must be a new world, if there is to be any world at all . . . These days of universal death must be days of universal newbirth, if the ruin is not to be total and final! It is a Time to make the dullest man consider; and ask himself, Whence *he* came? Whither is he bound?”<sup>161</sup>

This idea of a renaissance runs right through Carlyle’s works and appears in *Sartor Resartus* with the myth of the Phoenix. So the question of utopia is posed, although the answer is not clear. The prophet admits: “I have got no Morrison’s pill for curing the maladies of Society”, other than a return to nature.<sup>162</sup> The road to this transformation will not be “by smooth flowery paths”, but will have to cross

“steep untrodden places, through stormclad chasms, waste oceans, and the bosom of tornadoes; thank Heaven, if not through very Chaos and Abyss!”<sup>163</sup>

Where is this apocalyptic vision leading? Carlyle has great difficulty in telling us: “the ray of prophecy, at a short distance, expires”; “to shape the whole future is not our problem”; “the general issue will, as it has always done, rest well with a Higher Intelligence than ours”.<sup>164</sup> When he agrees to suggest

measures designed to ameliorate working-class poverty, they are measures of sanitation, education and, above all, emigration.<sup>165</sup> This last solution was to have a degree of success during the nineteenth century, and one imagines that it did not come up against any official hostility. If the workers take to it, writes Morris indignantly "their desertion will surely put off the Revolution . . ." <sup>166</sup> and if the bourgeoisie look upon it with so much favour, it is "to get rid temporarily of *their* responsibility and trouble over the people thrown out of work by the system of artificial famine". <sup>167</sup>

It is very rare for Carlyle to consider practical solutions. That is not at all his real concern. For him the essential is the restoration of authority and the cult of the hero: it is from that starting point that any regeneration becomes possible, and the people have no other rôle than to listen and to obey:

"Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here", <sup>168</sup>

and "the most significant feature in the history of an epoch is the manner it has of welcoming a Great Man". <sup>170</sup> There is no book of Carlyle's in which such phrases are not to be found. What, then, of his enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and what is the motive for this enthusiasm? It is, simply, that then "the bravest men, who . . . are also on the whole the wisest, the strongest, everyway best, had . . . been got selected", <sup>171</sup> and the example of the monk Samson shows that "a most 'practical' hero-worship went on, unconsciously or half-consciously, everywhere". <sup>172</sup> Such a view of the Middle Ages held nothing in common with Morris's. While he had been attracted by the conception of a society based upon human relationships, he could not follow Carlyle along this other road, and his interest was first and foremost to find in the ways and institutions of bygone centuries the survival of a brotherly, egalitarian community. The very idea of the cult of the hero seemed odious and ridiculous to him: democracy (and here he meant bourgeois democracy)

"will never be free from this hero-worship, and all the traps which the heroes (poor devils!) wittingly and unwittingly lead their worshippers into". <sup>173</sup>

In his eyes, all forms of this cult were ludicrous and the "aristocracy of talent", to which Carlyle devoted a whole chapter of *Past and Present*, provoked his contemptuous merriment. <sup>174</sup>

One can imagine what Morris's feelings might have been, seeing Carlyle develop his theory to its end. The latter begins by defending, in the name of an avowed conservatism ("all great peoples are conservative"), <sup>175</sup> hereditary aristocracy linked with land ownership: <sup>176</sup> by virtue of this ownership, it is "bound to furnish guidance and governance to England!" <sup>177</sup> Unfortunately it has become a "phantasm". <sup>178</sup> The "Owners of the Soil of England" are nothing more than an "Idle Aristocracy", good only for collecting rents and shooting partridges, presenting a spectacle before which, says Carlyle "we stand speechless, stupent, and know not what to say". It is time for this class "to find its duties and do them". The prophet threatens them with the thunderbolts of the French Revolution and the Meudon tanneries of human skin. <sup>179</sup> The dead wood must be trimmed out <sup>180</sup> and the aristocracy given back



its sense of obligation so that it can "learn what wretches feel, and how to cure it!"<sup>181</sup> By right, power belongs to it, but this power must be shared with the clergy, and of these two classes "there can be no doubt that the priest class is the more dignified":

"Europe requires a real aristocracy, a real priesthood, or it cannot continue to exist . . . aristocracy and priesthood, a governing class and a teaching class: these two, sometimes separate, and endeavouring to harmonise themselves, sometime conjoined as one, and the king a pontiff-king".<sup>182</sup>

This quasi-theocratic régime is founded upon a hierarchy imposed by the laws of nature:

"True enough, man is forever the 'born thrall' of certain men, born master of certain other men, born equal of certain others, let him acknowledge the fact or not. It is unblessed for him when he cannot acknowledge this fact; he is in the chaotic state, ready to perish, until he do get the fact acknowledged . . ." <sup>183</sup>

One has a strong feeling, however, that Carlyle, despite the strength of his convictions, has little hope of seeing the nobility mend its ways and accept the responsibilities of its position. With no fear of self-contradiction, he then turns to industry. Having very little sensitivity to the ugliness which horrified his contemporaries, he was bewitched by the immense progress in factory production and, in *Chartism*, he praised Arkwright and his mechanical inventions, the steam engine and even the beauty of Manchester.<sup>184</sup> In the factory owner he perceives "insight, courage, hard energy". These are aristocratic qualities: there are "Master-Workers who are not vulgar men; who are Nobles, and begin to feel that they must act as such". At present they are "England's hope",<sup>185</sup> and he exhorts them to accede completely to nobility:

"It is you I call; for ye are not dead, ye are already half-alive: there is in you a sleepless, dauntless energy, the prime-matter of all nobleness in man . . . ye know at least this, that the mandate of God to his creature man is: Work!" <sup>186</sup>

They constitute the last resort: "if there be no nobleness in them, there will never be an aristocracy more".<sup>187</sup> What has become inevitable is "an actual new sovereignty, industrial aristocracy, real not imaginary aristocracy".<sup>188</sup> It will constitute the "Chivalry of Labour", that of "Captains of Industry".<sup>189</sup> Obviously this new aristocracy will have to contribute something of its own, and above all, says Carlyle very seriously, "must understand that money alone is not the representative either of man's success in the world, or of man's duties to man".<sup>190</sup> It will suffice to convince it that "Mammonism is not the essence of his or of my station in God's universe".<sup>191</sup> The Captains of Industry will give proof of their nobility by reducing workers to obedience, by inculcating in them "order, just subordination, noble loyalty in return for noble guidance", and by making them into "a firm regimented mass".<sup>192</sup> And so will be resolved the silly old quarrels between Capital and Labour: their reconciliation will "put away the Evil Spirit" and both will strive together for "the guidance of a Good Spirit".<sup>193</sup> This idyllic atmosphere having been achieved, Carlyle even

wonders (timidly, it is true) whether, in a more or less distant future, the employer might not be able to grant his workers some interest in his business.<sup>144</sup>

But, as the years went by, Carlyle became sour. The revolutions of 1848 scared him; henceforth the stress was laid upon bringing the working class to heel and upon its regimentation. The "universal vital Problem" is to prevent the workers becoming "banditti, street-barricaders – destroyers of every Government". It is necessary to transform "Pauper Banditti into Soldiers of Industry". Once this regimentation has begun, the workers themselves will recognise its benefits and beg their employers to regiment them further until, finally, "there be no unregimented worker . . . any more".<sup>195</sup> And there is the culmination of Carlyle's social thinking. As Jean Freville so aptly remarks: "the denouncer of capitalism becomes its apologist. He has struggled only to strengthen it, to infuse new blood into it, to teach it energy and harshness."<sup>196</sup> In his last stage he reduced to mildness the criticism made by Marx and Engels of "feudal Socialism; half lamentation, half lampoon, half echo of the past, half menace of the future", but the authors of the *Manifesto* had not missed the mark when they wrote of the champions of feudal socialism that "what they upbraid the bourgeoisie with is not so much that it creates a proletariat, as that it creates a *revolutionary* proletariat".<sup>197</sup>

There is hardly any need to say that the whole of this aspect of Carlyle's ideology is the complete antithesis of William Morris's political and utopian thinking. On a closer examination, this opposition has its roots in the fundamental difference between Morris's and Carlyle's conceptions of work and happiness. For the latter, it remains theological: work is punishment for original sin. Certainly he praises it, but in what terms!

"All work, even cotton-spinning, is noble; work is alone noble . . . And in like manner too, all dignity is painful; a life of ease is not for any man, nor for any god . . . Our highest religion is named the 'Worship of Sorrow'. For the son of man there is no noble crown, well worn or even ill worn, but a crown of thorns." <sup>198</sup>

For Carlyle all work is an act of religious submission: "sweat of the brow; and up from that to sweat of the brain, sweat of the heart . . . up to that 'Agony of bloody sweat', which all men have called divine!"<sup>199</sup> In this ascetic ideology, where is there room for any urge to work? "The wages of every noble work," replies Carlyle, "do yet lie in Heaven or else nowhere";<sup>200</sup> difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death are the allurements that act on the heart of man.<sup>201</sup> Does that leave room for surprise that his social thinking should lead to constraint and regimentation? Was William Morris not thinking of Carlyle when he wrote:

"It has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself – a convenient belief for those who live on the labour of others"?" <sup>202</sup>

It is precisely because today a curse lies upon work that Morris wishes, in his utopia, to transform its nature radically and make it the source of all human happiness. The reward for work, he says, will be the work itself.

So there seems to me to be little justification for regarding Carlyle as an in-

spirer of Morris's utopia. Certainly his social criticism, bristling with striking phrases, had an indisputable influence upon Morris, and we can say of it what Marx and Engels said of feudal socialism: "its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very hearts' core".<sup>203</sup>

His denunciation of Victorian hypocrisy was also for Morris very satisfying moral provender. But these were points of departure, from which their roads diverged. When Carlyle died in 1881, our poet felt a loss, although he considered that his work was long since finished.<sup>204</sup> Full of indulgence and conscious of his original debt, he considered that he was, after all, "on the right side, in spite of all faults".<sup>205</sup> But it is quite certain that, apart even from his cult of the hero and all that derived from it politically, Morris had difficulty in accepting "the ferocity of his gloom" in which he saw, purely and simply, evidence of a chronic liver complaint.<sup>206</sup> He detested puritanism and must have felt but little interest in his theological and transcendentalistic effusions. Not only Carlyle's conception of work, but also his indifference towards art were calculated to alienate his sympathy.<sup>207</sup> No doubt his Teutonism fitted in with Morris's personal inclinations but the content of this feeling differed greatly from one to the other: one exalted Nordic strength, the other Nordic democracy.

Perhaps Morris never expressed better the impression which reading Carlyle left with him than in this remark recorded by Yeats: "Somebody should have been beside Carlyle and punched his head every five minutes."<sup>208</sup> This reading, I repeat, must be regarded as a starting point, a kind of stimulus, the shock of which was strong enough to be gratefully remembered by Morris for the rest of his life. But it would be going too far to try to make more of it. This conclusion seems to me to be confirmed by scrutiny of two texts. Recalling the influences which bore upon him in his earlier years, Morris cites Carlyle and Ruskin; but he straightaway launches upon an enthusiastic evocation of the latter, without adding the smallest comment to his mention of the former.<sup>209</sup> Further, in a letter of 1882, he said of Ruskin that he was "the first comer, the inventor",<sup>210</sup> which eliminates Carlyle, who was, nevertheless, chronologically earlier.

## 6. Ruskin

The lasting attachment Morris displayed towards Carlyle is a shade surprising, despite its detached and reticent nature. There is a strong temptation to seek the reason for it in the greater influence exerted upon him by John Ruskin. The latter worshipped the prophet of Chelsea all his life, in a filial respectful sort of way. He wrote that he owed everything to him and, he added, I have "read (him) so constantly, that, without wilfully setting myself to imitate him, I find myself perpetually falling into his modes of expression . . . I find Carlyle's stronger thinking colouring mine continually".<sup>211</sup>

Not without a certain irony, John D. Rosenberg goes further and observes that "if Turner taught Ruskin how to see, Carlyle taught him how to preach".<sup>212</sup> Perhaps Ruskin would have achieved the preaching tone on his own, but there is no doubt that so impressive a use of the Gospels and the Prophets offered a precedent and model that he could not disregard. It is not



too much to add that this tone can sometimes be detected, watered down and laicised, in Morris's early lectures.

If our poet, in all probability, allowed the influence of Ruskin to impose a principle of fidelity to Carlyle, the same influence appears to have kept him away from another inspiration to which he would probably have responded, that of Pugin. The publication of *Contrasts* in 1836 had been an event. It was a declaration of war against the architecture and the civilisation of the nineteenth century, with its ugliness and impiety thrown into graphic relief by the praising of Gothic monuments. But with the fanatical zeal of a new convert, Pugin identified the Gothic revival with a return to the Catholic faith. That was enough to arouse the anger and aversion of Ruskin, long imprisoned in narrow, sectarian Protestantism. It is obvious that many an "anti-Romanist" passage in *The Stones of Venice* is a violent attack upon Pugin's aesthetic and religious ideology.<sup>213</sup> From the same source also comes the persistent tendency to look for anti-papist elements in mediaeval art. With a vigour that is perhaps not without some bad faith, Ruskin asserts that he owes absolutely nothing to Pugin.<sup>214</sup> The assertion certainly leaves room for discussion; however, our object here is to study Morris's sources, not those of Ruskin. The former had no inclination to become involved in religious squabbles that aroused no echo within him. His admiration for the art of the Middle Ages would scarcely have been reconciled with Catholic and theocratic proselytism and more readily joined forces with Ruskin's enthusiasm, inspired with more human and deeper feelings, even if they were soaked in a biblical spirituality. Let us not forget either, that, on Morris's own admission, it was reading Ruskin's books that snatched him from the Anglo-Catholicism which had so greatly attracted him in his student days.<sup>215</sup> He no doubt found it repellent to see Pugin applying ecclesiastical norms to all his architectural achievements. These achievements were, in themselves, antipathetic: it seemed absurd to him to create Gothic (and what Gothic!) in the conditions of the nineteenth century, copying and re-inventing forms in the absence of the survival of any creative urge in the Victorian worker. They provoked his scornful irony on the only two occasions in all of his works when he makes any reference to Pugin.<sup>216</sup> If it is true, as several writers claim,<sup>217</sup> that one can observe certain aesthetic and ideological resemblances between the two men, it would be dangerous to look for direct influence. Morris followed Ruskin in his aloof attitude towards Pugin. If there is an effective influence, it can only be through Ruskin himself, who, albeit grudgingly, turned over and embroidered in his writings general ideas which were in any event already more or less based upon the general body of mediaevalist ideology of the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, it was this elaboration in depth which provided Morris with the basic matter for his thinking up to 1883, before it underwent the modifications necessitated by the assimilation of Marxist thought.

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If Morris never had any direct contact with Carlyle, with Ruskin, on the other hand, he had a lasting friendly relationship from 1856, and there were even closer links between Ruskin and Burne-Jones. The latter recounts in ecstatic

terms the enthusiasm then felt by the two young men.<sup>218</sup> Ruskin encouraged their early artistic careers, he promised (without being able to keep his word) to collaborate in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*,<sup>219</sup> and held Morris's talents as an illuminator in high esteem.<sup>220</sup> In the following year he visited the group which was painting the short-lived murals in the Oxford Union.<sup>221</sup> Later, he admired Morris's poems and, after the publication of *Jason*, did not hesitate to compare him with Keats, praising in both of them truth that is "vital, not formal",<sup>222</sup> a typical formula which recurred for some time in Morris's writing. We find evidence of various visits and meetings between the two writers,<sup>223</sup> and the tone of their conversations seems to have been filled with easy cordiality.<sup>224</sup> When, in 1877, Morris gave his first public lecture, he excused himself for repeating what had been said so well before by his "friend, Professor John Ruskin".<sup>225</sup> That was the year of the foundation of *Anti-Scrape*. Not only did Ruskin agree to be a member of the committee, but Morris credited him with being the father of the movement and asked his permission to include in the manifesto a fragment of *Seven Lamps of Architecture* relevant to the sacrilegious "restoration" of ancient monuments.<sup>226</sup> He had the master's support and signature for the petitions organised by the Society, notably in 1881, when it protested against the widening of Magdalen Bridge in Oxford,<sup>227</sup> and, in 1889, he was still invoking his authority at the annual general meeting.<sup>228</sup> This flow of friendship was not only in one direction, and in 1878, on the occasion of the famous lawsuit brought by Whistler, Morris expressed his support for Ruskin, support less direct and more cautious than that of Burne-Jones, but which gained the poet a warm letter of gratitude.<sup>229</sup> He was happy to be able to do him a service; so, at his request, he gave him detailed information about the technique of stained glass, as he practised it at Merton Abbey.<sup>230</sup>

However, it seems, and it is a fact of which we should take note, that these direct contacts came to an end after 1883. One striking event for Morris of that year, during which he experienced the revelation of Marxism, was the lecture he gave in Oxford on *Art under Plutocracy*, with Ruskin in the chair, and which provoked an uproar. It was the first in which Ruskin's aesthetic and human message was closely linked with his own socialist convictions. The attitude of the latter, during the lecture, is not really known to us. According to a late and rather indefinite piece of evidence, he appears to have behaved with great tact and to let it appear, in the face of the attacks directed against Morris, that he was in agreement with him.<sup>231</sup> He spoke of his lecture again, a year later, in *The Art of England*, but his comments are somewhat odd and he does not appear to have had the slightest idea of what the speaker was aiming at. He was content to follow his own line of thought and to attribute to Morris intentions quite alien to him. I shall return to the point later. The fact is that, during the following years, we find no further trace of any meeting or correspondence between the two men. Certainly, the deterioration in Ruskin's health and his intermittent mental unbalance would be an explanation. However it does not seem enough. It is striking, in fact, that Morris does not seem to have read or wanted to read the books which the master published after 1862, in which his expressions of political thought became more and more confused. One has a very clear impression that he wished to remain true to the message of Ruskin's great years and had the unexpressed feeling that it

was preferable not to ruin a friendship and an enthusiasm which later contact would risk changing.

And so they kept their mutual esteem intact. On 6 April 1887, Sydney Cockerell visited Ruskin, who told him that Morris was "beaten gold" and, again, "a great rock with a little moss on it perhaps" and one does not know quite what to make of that last simile. He told him that his "love of Turner, primroses and little girls had prevented his ever being Morris's close friend, but he had a great reverence for him and for his views".

On 15 April 1892, Cockerell paid another visit. The Kelmscott Press had just published *The Nature of Gothic*, and a copy, with an affectionate inscription from Morris, lay on Ruskin's table. He told his visitor what pleasure it had given him and declared that Morris was "the ablest man of his time". The poet, told two days later of this appreciation, was overjoyed, and that evening, dining with Emery Walker, "ordered up a bottle of his favourite Imperial Tokay for the proper celebration of so great a compliment".<sup>232</sup>

This late date shows clearly that Morris's personal feelings for Ruskin remained just as fervent,<sup>233</sup> despite or perhaps because of this physical separation (but was it only physical?). He always remained responsive to the magic of Ruskin's style and he considered that the passage in *The Nature of Gothic* where Ruskin gives a bird's-eye description of the lands of the north and the south was to be reckoned among "the finest writing in the English language".<sup>234</sup> His early lectures overflowed with admiration for "his unequalled style" and "his wonderful eloquence".<sup>235</sup> One feels him to be, during these pre-Marxist years, entirely under the spell of his master, and he humbly declares himself to be content "to be echoing his words".<sup>236</sup> In the famous 1883 lecture, to which I referred and which marks a decisive turning point, he recalls Ruskin's ideas on art, expressing man's joy in work, and adds:

"If those are not Professor Ruskin's words they embody at least his teaching on this subject."<sup>237</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the last occasion upon which Morris was content to be just an interpreter and message-bearer.

This attention I am paying to dates by no means stems from a gratuitous preoccupation with erudition. Ruskin's influence upon Morris was not only undeniable, but lasting. But it is still appropriate to define its limits. While one can distinguish certain constant factors in Ruskin's thought, it is none the less true that contradictions abound and even multiply as his work becomes more abstruse, more confused and (we must not be afraid to say it) more rambling. Morris clearly made a choice, and I think that nothing will better help us to define its nature than a close examination of the readings to which he refers himself or that are indicated by his contemporaries and biographers.

We learn from Canon Dixon's memories, recorded by Mackail, that in 1864 Burne-Jones and Morris, then students at Exeter College, read *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, the first volumes of *Modern Painters* and the *Stones of Venice* for the first time and with passionate enthusiasm. It appears, in fact, that they had been acquainted with at least the last two of these works since 1853.<sup>238</sup> Their admiration for *Modern Painters* seems to have been, at that time, mainly literary and aesthetic, since Morris chose especially to read aloud to his friends the descriptions of the Slave-ship and Turner's skies.<sup>239</sup> One may nevertheless



suppose that, from that time, his love of nature not only found sustenance there, but also the embryo of thought close to Ruskin's. He himself does not refer to the *Seven Lamps* until 1877, as we have seen, when he claimed Ruskin's authority as he joined battle with the "restorers"; but it is clear that he must have been struck by the insistence upon the rôle and significance of architecture. If he speaks relatively little of this book, it is because the ideas were taken up again in *The Stones of Venice*, to which it forms a prelude, with infinitely more breadth and brilliance.

Obviously it is there that the essence of Ruskin's influence is to be sought. Morris never ceased recalling the "deep impression"<sup>240</sup> that these three volumes, in particular chapter IV of Volume II, *The Nature of Gothic*, made upon him. This is the chapter to which he constantly refers in his early lectures. These are "the truest and the most eloquent words that can possibly be said on the subject",<sup>241</sup> "words more clear and eloquent than any man else now living could use".<sup>242</sup> His enthusiasm remained just as fervent afterwards. He saw in the conception of mediaeval art unfolded in this chapter "a marvellous inspiration of genius".<sup>243</sup> Finally, in 1892, he published, in the magnificent editions of the Kelmscott Press, *The Nature of Gothic*, which "can be well considered as a separate piece of work", and to which he supplied a preface in which he declared that "it is one of the most important things written by the author, and in future days will be considered as one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century".

He considers the chapter important, less for its "artistic side" than for its "ethical and political" side, and it is this aspect, he adds, "which has had the most enduring and beneficent effect on his contemporaries, and will have through them on succeeding generations". In defining art as the expression of man's joy in his work (and it is this fundamental idea that Morris selects here from the chapter) Ruskin "has done serious and solid work towards the new birth of Society".<sup>244</sup>

In this same preface Morris mentions another of Ruskin's writings, *Unto this Last*, "a great book" marking the "culmination" of the ethical and political thought already expressed in *The Nature of Gothic*. He had, his daughter May tells us, a great admiration for this work as a "direct and eloquent statement of the condition of Art & Labour in the century".<sup>245</sup> At the moment when the chapter from *The Stones of Venice* was being published, he mentioned to Sydney Cockerell his intention of publishing *Unto this Last* also at the Kelmscott Press.<sup>246</sup> He did nothing about it, however, and it is worthy of note that he changed his mind. In fact, although the book expressed many ideas dear to Morris about true riches, the need for real human relationships, and the misdeeds of mercantilism, it also contained a clear profession of paternalistic and anti-socialist faith and many other hardly democratic observations with which Morris was in complete disagreement. Undoubtedly the same tendencies were already present in *The Nature of Gothic*, but their expression was still veiled and infinitely less brutal than in *Unto this Last*. One can very well understand why Morris did not carry out his first intention, and it is a measure of the insincerity of Mackail that he should have written: "The whole of the Socialism with which Morris identified himself so prominently in the 'eighties had been implicitly contained, and the greater part of it explicitly stated in the pages of *Unto this Last* in 1862".<sup>247</sup> We know what Mackail was getting at: he was trying

to stretch the modest Ruskinian screen beyond its limits to conceal the regrettable influence of scientific socialism. How many imitators have followed in his tracks!

At the same time as she mentions the very understandable admiration her father felt for this book, May Morris also speaks of that which he felt for *The Political Economy of Art* (1857), of which Morris himself never speaks, but which also contains familiar ideas, mingled with others that are less so. We know, moreover, that in 1854 he read the *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*: these are the famous Edinburgh lectures which initiated him into Pre-Raphaelitism and even acquainted him with the name of Rossetti.<sup>248</sup> A brief note of Sydney Cockerell's, dated 1892, tells us that one evening, at Gatti's Restaurant, Morris and P. W. (probably Philip Webb) discussed *Munera Pulveris* (1862) with him.<sup>249</sup> Neither of these two books is mentioned in Morris's works either, but the fact that he read them means that we must take them into account. As far as Ruskin's other writings are concerned, we have no indication. It very much appears that, with the exception of *Fors Clavigera*,<sup>250</sup> he had no contact with any later work than *Unto this Last*, but I cannot possibly state this with any certainty and I have thought it prudent not to neglect such of these works as express ideas close to those which inspired Morris, to the extent that their expression is more explicit, more concise or more revealing.

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It is extremely awkward to analyse texts as well known as those of Ruskin, about which there is already an abundant literature. At the risk of seeming very cursory, I shall avoid long quotations as far as possible and confine myself to the essence. It would be absurd to make here another full study of Ruskin's thought. We must not forget that we are interested simply in examining the depth of the influence he exerted upon Morris and the limits of that influence. So, above all, it will be a study of themes.

The theme which must, chronologically speaking, have first influenced Morris's sensibility and ideology was the love of nature, considered as the source of all beauty and of all art. The dazzling descriptions of *Modern Painters* bewitched him first. The soil upon which these precious seeds were scattered was truly fertile, and the young student, reared in the rustic intimacy of Walthamstow and Woodford, where his gift of observation and his wonder at the things of the earth were shaped, was quite ready to listen to such enchantments. Immediately, however, a fundamental difference showed itself. While Ruskin's landscapes are of delicate literary devising and glitter with a vocabulary bespangled and bejewelled with pictorial analogy, the descriptions which Morris has left us of the banks of the Thames or the mountains of Iceland are strikingly simple. While Ruskin seeks in nature a spirituality that is at once aesthetic and sensual, Morris finds direct, active physical contact. For Ruskin, alpine torrents are the iridescent sinews of a divine essence, but for Morris the banks of the Thames, seen at Runnymede in the early morning, are filled with the simple delight of an angler. For Ruskin, nature is intellectual, for Morris manual, and their tongues to understand and describe it have nothing in common. But their love for it is equally intense and it is with one tongue that they designate it the single

possible inspiration for art. Throughout his life our poet remained faithful to the precept formulated in *Modern Painters*:

"Go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning and remember her instruction: rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing." <sup>251</sup>

In his practice of the decorative arts as in his utopian aesthetics he was inspired by the master's injunctions: "whatever is . . . fair or beautiful is imitated from natural forms . . . man cannot advance in the invention of beauty, without directly imitating natural form". <sup>252</sup> This theme is constantly reiterated in *The Stones of Venice*. "All noble ornamentation," writes Ruskin, "is the expression of man's delight in God's work", <sup>253</sup> and this is why "all beautiful works of art must either intentionally imitate or accidentally resemble natural forms". <sup>254</sup>

He goes a very long way in the application of this principle, and, making great use of plates, graphically shows that "our first constituents of ornament will therefore be abstract lines, that is to say, the most frequent contours of natural objects". <sup>255</sup>

It is by virtue of having understood this necessity that mediaeval art was able to attain such a degree of splendour. The Gothic arch is "not the most beautiful because it is the strongest, but most beautiful because its form is one of those which, as we know by its frequent occurrence in the work of Nature around us, has been appointed by the Deity to be an everlasting source of pleasure to the human mind." <sup>256</sup>

The glory of Gothic art lies, in particular, in its having broken away from the artificial models of Greek art and succeeded in rediscovering the true forms of foliage; <sup>257</sup> more generally of having practised the most noble "naturalism"; that is the theme of a well known development of the chapter *The Nature of Gothic*. Another trait of this Christian art of the Middle Ages, arising from this "naturalism", is the richness of decoration, born of "a profound sympathy with the fullness and wealth of the material universe". <sup>258</sup> No wonder in that, because "there is material enough in a single flower for the ornament of a score of cathedrals". <sup>259</sup>

This love of nature, source of all art, has a particular aspect with Ruskin which we find again in Morris. It is closely linked, in fact, with a love of healthiness, with, perhaps, this difference, that the love was instinctive with Morris and with Ruskin was probably a despairing reaction against his own morbidity. Thus Morris took up the condemnation of "such picturesqueness as results from decay, disorder and disease". <sup>260</sup> In this range of ideas, where psychology and ideology meet, we may note also Ruskin's pronounced liking for colour and light, which is shown equally by Morris.

"Colour power," he wrote, "is a great sign of mental health in nations; when they are in a state of intellectual decline, their colouring always gets dull." <sup>261</sup>

Of all God's gifts, he says again, "colour is the holiest, the most divine, the most solemn", and he proclaims his horror of all painters devoted to browns and greys and who delighted in shadows: Salvator Rosa, the Caracci, Guido Reui, Rembrandt, Murillo, Zurbaran, Procaccini, Teniers. For him, shadow



is as painful as monotony.<sup>262</sup> Such language must have been pleasing to Morris, the sunny utopist, capable by the magic of his vision of transforming murky nineteenth-century London into a city of joyous light and iridescent colour. The visionary of the future was made for the understanding of the visionary of immediately perceptible nature. For one as for the other, comprehension of the world was essentially visual. Ruskin's great merit was that of teaching his contemporaries to see. John D. Rosenberg, always a little acid, reminds us how responsive they were to *ex cathedra* eloquence: "By writing sermons," he writes, "he got the Victorians to lend him their ears that he might open their eyes."<sup>263</sup> This was the purpose of long sermonising, more than once echoed by Morris.

"The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world," exclaimed Ruskin, "is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, – all in one."<sup>264</sup>

To see and to learn to see, that is, indeed, an injunction which Morris, in his turn, never stopped repeating. But to see what? His vision of nature really has nothing in common with Ruskin's. Morris could think as well as see, there was poetry and prophecy. But discreetly he refused to go any further. In fact, feeling for nature, poetry, prophecy, all these were just synonyms for religion for Ruskin. Perhaps not always for that Protestant bigotry which long held him prisoner, but certainly always for that biblical and providential spirituality into which all his enthusiasms flow – and let us note that most of the books which influenced Morris belong to the sectarian period. The successive volumes of *Modern Painters* are a monument of finalist geology: it would be of no interest for our study, and unnecessarily cruel, to pick out Ruskin's verbose declarations upon the finality of rivers, deserts and mountains. All that must have left Morris completely indifferent, until in the end he lost patience at the fifth volume and flatly declared that it consisted of "mostly gammon".<sup>265</sup> The shocked and naive meditations in *The Stones of Venice* upon the problem of evil in nature<sup>266</sup> no doubt made very little impression, and he was ready to accept indulgently, among so many thoughts of admirable profundity, all those which, while being alien to his own way of thinking, did not clash headlong with what was essential to him, his socialist conviction. This explains why he was able to publish *The Nature of Gothic* from the Kelmscott Press and had to give up the idea of publishing *Unto this Last*. It really is a matter of indulgence here, when one recalls Ruskin's many references to Wordsworth, whom Morris detested. For our poet indeed, nature is a primary fact, free from all animism or mystical essence. For Ruskin, on the contrary, the love of nature is the "love of all things that God has created to be beautiful, and pronounced to be good";<sup>267</sup> and (this must have made Morris smile), of two individuals, "the one who loves nature most will be *always* found to have more *faith in God* than the other".<sup>268</sup> What must be liked, he says again "is God's work, which He made for our delight and contentment in this world".<sup>269</sup> On this point, as on many others, Morris's conduct is very characteristic. He is ready to accompany Ruskin a good way along the road. But without fuss, gently stubborn, he takes up his thought and completely secularises it. He leaves Ruskin with creation, original sin and divine finalities, and is satisfied with "pleasure" and

"contentment in this world". Perhaps he had a feeling (justified, moreover, by the master's conversions and "deconversions") that the sensual love of nature, source of all art, was of more importance than religious passion, even in moments of evangelical ecstacy. In Ruskin he loved the pagan who did not recognise himself, who refused to admit himself as such, and who could write in his private diary, with the idea of a coming visit to his beloved Alps, "I should be almost fainting with joy, and should want to lie down on the earth and take it in my arms".<sup>270</sup> This is, already, the cry of Ellen in *News from Nowhere*.

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How are we to know better this nature which is good because it is divine? Ruskin literally overflows with knowledge of geology, mineralogy, botany, ornithology. But this encyclopaedic knowledge is put entirely at the service of his faith and often assumes an appearance comparable to mediaeval symbolics. It cannot be an end in itself and must remain the humble handmaiden of the vision. Flowers "are only to be seen rightly with the eyes which the God who made them gave us; and neither with microscopes nor spectacles".<sup>271</sup> The artisans of the Middle Ages, totally ignorant of chemistry as they were, produced work which "at this day [is] the despair of all who look upon it".<sup>272</sup> Knowledge is only good for man "so long as he can keep it utterly, servilely, subordinate to his divine work".<sup>273</sup> Let us beware of "the old Eve-sin": "We no more live to know than we live to eat. We live to contemplate, enjoy, act, adore";<sup>274</sup> What could be the use of mathematical science, "the most important facts being always quite immeasurable"?<sup>275</sup> A purely technical geography will allow us to know the difference between countries "in detail, but we have not that broad glance and grasp which would enable us to feel them in their fullness".<sup>276</sup> Morris, as we shall see in due course, did not have this attitude of systematic hostility towards science. However, it cannot be doubted that Ruskin encouraged a tendency in him to restrict the part of scientific and technical culture in the sum of values of future humanity. Morris feared, as did Ruskin, that the acquisition and application of knowledge might raise a screen between nature and man, hiding, not "his divine task", but simply his human quality.

If Morris's judgment is much more graduated than Ruskin's, it is, perhaps, because the latter belonged to a generation closer to the memory of old rural England and, therefore, more traumatised by the onrush of industrial civilisation and the invasion of smoke from factories and trains. It is probable (and we find it difficult to realise today) that this sudden horror was the greater because coal was the only energy source of the time and because urban overcrowding, consequent upon the development of manufacturing industry, took place amidst anarchy, poverty, lack of hygiene and squalor: These "horrible nests, which you call towns, are little more than laboratories for the distillation into heaven of venomous smokes and smells, mixed with the effluvia from decaying animal matter, infectious miasmata from purulent disease"; at present we "turn every river of England into a common sewer, so that you cannot so much as baptize an English baby but with filth, unless you hold its face out in the rain; and even *that* falls dirty".<sup>277</sup>

So it is science in the service of industry (Morris says: in the service of profit, which introduces an important distinction) which contributes to the pollution of that nature without which there can be no beauty. It is interesting to note in passing that *The Crown of Wild Olive* opens with a bitter protest against the transformations which have defaced the countryside along the banks of the River Wandle, near which Morris was to establish his Merton Abbey workshops. Ruskin is full of rancour against steam-driven machinery, incapable of producing "so much as one grain of corn" and against railways, which are an "infernal" means of locomotion, in the literal sense of the word,<sup>278</sup> which transform man from a traveller into a living parcel", who has "parted with the nobler characteristics of his humanity for the sake of planetary power of locomotion".<sup>279</sup>

In truth, Ruskin's anti-machinism abounds in contradictions and it is very difficult to sort out a clear doctrine. At one moment he sees mechanical progress as "a mere passing fever",<sup>280</sup> at another he is preaching "the conceivable use of machinery on a colossal scale . . . so rendering parts of the earth habitable which hitherto have been lifeless".<sup>281</sup> Innumerable quotations would be needed to bring order into this confusion, without getting us much further forward. From the mass of texts it seems best to me to pick out a few details which might have influenced Morris's thinking. What seems to stand out is, first, that Ruskin's hostility is not so much directed towards the machine in general but above all towards the steam engine with its coal smoke. He accepts "all machinery needful in ordinary life to supplement human or animal labour" provided that it is "moved by wind or water, while *steam* . . . may only be employed justifiably under extreme or special conditions of need" for any work "beyond human strength".<sup>282</sup> For him the essential thing is to rid nature and human surroundings of this smoke, this pollution, this ugliness spread by coal and steam engines. At no moment does he feel Morris's prescintiment or the hope for the new and mysterious form of energy, available everywhere, which will liberate life in the future from the scourges of the nineteenth century. His only care is to get rid of it, whatever the consequences, and he goes as far as to ask for those who emigrate (like Carlyle, he advocates emigration) to export industry to the colonies with them in order to allow England to be covered again with cornfields, pasture land and flowers.<sup>283</sup> His dream is of a return to agriculture pure and simple and to manual work "through instruments which assist, but do not supersede, the muscular action of the human hand".<sup>284</sup> It is to the point to observe that all these proposals were put forward for immediate action, and Ruskin expected to open the way to such reforms by means of his lamentable utopian experiment of the Guild of St. George. Morris kept well clear of such naiveties. What he drew from them was put into a distant prospect and presented as a logically possible climax to history, based upon the data of scientific socialism.

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If, as we shall have many occasions to observe, logic was one of Morris's supreme qualities, it was not often displayed by Ruskin. However, he did draw certain consequences from the anti-scientific and anti-industrial stand he took. It led, in fact, to a definition of human needs which Morris adapted to his own



system. Abjuring all energy sources other than air and water, and deprived, albeit not without hesitation, of mechanical production (Morris is not guilty of similar imprudence), Ruskin, with the optimism of ignorance, is sure that, with the help of Providence, all that is needed to ensure man's subsistence is good organisation of work. He does not tell us what this is or how it is to be brought about. What matter!

"The world is so regulated by the laws of Providence, that man's labour, well applied, is always amply sufficient to provide him during his life with all things needful to him, and not only with those, but with many pleasant objects of luxury; and yet farther to procure him large intervals of healthful rest and serviceable lesiure."<sup>285</sup>

Coming back to a more realistic viewpoint, and not worried about contradicting himself, Ruskin, after consideration, cuts out the luxury, defining it as:

"All dainty (as distinguished from nourishing) food, and means of producing it; all scents not needed for health; substances valued only for their appearance and rarity (as gold and jewels); flowers of difficult culture; animals used for delight (as horses for racing)."<sup>286</sup>

It is better to cut stone than diamonds or rubies,<sup>287</sup> he writes, without caring that three years earlier he said the opposite in *The Stones of Venice*, at that time condemning glass trinkets and imitations of marble and of wood.<sup>288</sup> He considered luxury in funerals and tombs absurd.<sup>289</sup> All these useless products disappear in Morris's utopia as well, but his originality lies in abolishing at the same time all the wretched shoddy and dull cottons which capitalism reserved to the poor.

The question of clothing also engaged Ruskin's attention, and one feels him to be somewhat hesitant. He gets out of it by a sort of compromise, justified by his mediaevalist fervour, and it is worth our while to pause a moment, because we find the echo of his words in Morris. Nobleness of dress, he writes, exerts "a perpetual influence upon character, tending in a thousand ways to increase dignity and self-respect, and, together with grace of gesture, to induce serenity of thought". In the Middle Ages, "the splendour and fantasy even of dress . . . were . . . studied for love of their true beauty and honourableness, and became one of the main helps to dignity of character and courtesy of bearing".

But, he adds, the greatest magnificence is not the most admirable.

"It was still in the thirteenth century . . . when . . . the manner of dress seems to have been noblest . . . The women wore first a dress close to the form . . . then long and flowing robes, veiling them up to the neck, and delicately embroidered around the hem, the sleeves and the girdle."

It was only from the fifteenth century that luxury attained a "morbid magnificence, devoid of all wholesome influence on manners", thence to degenerate into modern ugliness.<sup>290</sup> Ruskin returns to this subject in *The Political Economy of Art*:

"No good historical painting ever yet existed, or ever can exist, where the dresses of the people of the time are not beautiful and had it not been

for the lovely and fantastic dressing of the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, neither French, nor Florentine, nor Venetian art could have risen to anything like the rank it reached: Still, even then, the best dressing was never the costliest; and its effect depended much more on its beautiful and, in earliest times, modest, arrangement, and on the simple and lovely masses of its colour, than on the gorgeousness of clasp or embroidery. Whether we can ever return to those more perfect types of form, is questionable; but there can be no more question that all the money we spend on the forms of dress at present worn . . . is wholly lost."<sup>291</sup>

In fact, Ruskin's simplifications come far less from a purpose of "political economy" though he loves to roll the phrase around his tongue, than from moral, even theological, considerations. They are the consequences of that "spiritual condition which every Christian ought to recognise in himself, a state of homelessness on earth, except so far as he can make the Most High his habitation".<sup>292</sup>

He proclaims also that "the ideal of human life is a union of Spartan simplicity of manners with Athenian sensibility and imagination".<sup>293</sup> When he really wants to tackle economic reality, he states that "luxuries, whether national or personal, must be paid for by labour withdrawn from useful things",<sup>294</sup> despite the fact that an aphorism of this kind displays a complete ignorance of the nature of the State and of property. He rejects any form of social subversion, and moralises as though classes did not exist, as though the unity of the body politic was a constant fact:

"In due time, when we have nothing better to set people to work at, it may be right to let them make lace and cut jewels; but as long as there are any who have no blankets for their beds: and no rags for their bodies, so long is it blanket-making and tailoring we must set people to work at – not lace." <sup>295</sup>

Morris could not but subscribe to this idea, and he did so the more readily because he had resolved the inextricable contradiction in which Ruskin was bogged down. He followed him with even greater pleasure because the latter, being subject to another contradiction, could not for long reconcile his Protestant asceticism with the natural sensuality of his pagan aesthetics.

"Luxury," said Ruskin finally, "is indeed possible in the future – innocent and exquisite; luxury for all, and by the help of all".<sup>296</sup>

He was ever ready to accord a degree of indulgence to existing luxury. Even when draped in his own censorial toga, he recognised that

"three fourths of the demands existing in the world are romantic; founded on visions, idealisms, hopes, and affections; and the regulation of the purse is, in its essence, regulation of the imagination and the heart".<sup>297</sup>

So he was brought to the formulation of a reckoning of the fundamental values of existence, which Morris took up in similar language but much more precisely. No doubt Ruskin could not help remembering that, in the Middle Ages, riches were "looked upon by the best men not only as contemptible, but

criminal", while "the Spirit of Poverty was revered".<sup>298</sup> But his sensual love for divine creation quickly led him to pose the alternative in very different terms, those of true and false riches.

The attempt was first semantic, resting upon the sense given to the three words wealth, money and riches, which "are often used as synonymous, but they signify entirely different things": wealth signifies: "things in themselves valuable"; money "documentary claims to the possession of such things"; and riches "is a relative term, expressing the magnitude of the possessions of one person or society as compared with those of other persons or societies".<sup>299</sup> Then, turning to the etymological considerations, he wrote: "What is really desired, under the name of riches, is, essentially, power over men",<sup>300</sup> and Morris included this definition as part of his own. In truth, Ruskin's semantic effort petered out, and he quite often used the words riches and wealth interchangeably. Morris, on the contrary, distinguished them and set one against the other with scrupulous care: for him, wealth was always true riches, that is to say, not at all the possession, so much as the enjoyment, of the good things of this world, while riches always meant personal fortune derived from the exploitation of others' labour. Ruskin sometimes expressed this opposition by inventing a neologism, the opposite of wealth being "illth" (meaning reprehensible riches).<sup>301</sup>

Of course, he did not fail to give moral overtones to his definitions: "the term wealth is never to be attached to the accidental object of a morbid desire, but only to the constant object of a legitimate one".<sup>302</sup> Nevertheless, when he developed these themes throughout *Unto this Last*, his thought became more and more earthly and there is no doubt that this tone, so much closer to his own, roused Morris's enthusiasm for that book.<sup>303</sup> Ruskin defined his "political economy" as assisting simply "in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things".<sup>304</sup> The present system is the opposite of such a state of affairs: "capital which produces nothing but capital is only root producing root; bulb issuing in bulb, never in tulip; seed issuing in seed, never in bread".<sup>305</sup> The aim of production is "consumption absolute" and is its "crown and perfection";<sup>306</sup> "the wealth of a nation is only to be estimated by what it consumes . . . the money-gain being only the shadow of the true gain, which is humanity".<sup>307</sup>

"The final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures".

And he added bitterly that "our modern wealth . . . has rather a tendency the other way".<sup>308</sup> The true science of political economy as he understood it, is "that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life: and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction".<sup>309</sup> True riches are made up of all the goods necessary to man's existence, but, "as the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary; – the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle".<sup>310</sup> The final cry of this hymn to joy is: "There is no wealth but life!"<sup>311</sup> which is a veritable prelude to *News from Nowhere*.



This general and more or less coherent view of nature and life leads steadily to a philosophy of art, itself intimately linked to historical and social thought. Here, undoubtedly, Morris drew the essence of his aesthetics. He preserved one central idea intact – namely the prime importance of architecture and the vigilant care of which it must be the object.

While in fact, Ruskin says, few people feel that painting concerns them, “all men are concerned with architecture, and have at some time in their lives serious business with it”.<sup>312</sup> Today, the ugliness of our towns is such that “we find all men of true feeling delighting to escape out of modern cities into natural scenery”.<sup>313</sup> This evil must be remedied. The advantages of town life are no compensation for our loss of contact with the charms of nature. That is why

“the function of our architecture is, as far as may be, to replace these; to tell us about Nature; to possess us with memories of her quietness; to be solemn and full of tenderness, like her, and rich in portaitures of her”.<sup>314</sup>

Morris certainly remained faithful to this architectural naturalism, but his utopian ideology kept him from pushing it too far. In so far as, in the Marxist expression, he abolished “the contradiction between town and country”, he no longer had any need to palliate the vanished curse of escapism, and Ruskin’s idea was substantially modified: Morris’s preoccupation was rather the marriage of architecture with natural ornament.

However, he was unreservedly in agreement with Ruskin in considering that a building must before any other considerations satisfy the human needs which led to its construction:

“The sacrifice of any of these first requirements to external appearance is a futility and absurdity.”

But, adds Ruskin, once they are satisfied “comes the divine part of the work – namely, to turn these dead walls into living ones . . . Ornamentation is therefore the principal part of architecture”, and it follows “that a great architect must be a great sculptor or painter”.<sup>315</sup> That was a principle which Morris pushed a great deal further: not only did he encompass painting and sculpture in what he called architecture, but he made its service their only function. This rejection of individualistic art was, moreover, admirably expressed by Ruskin when he defined the primacy of architecture by the fact that it is “the expression of the average power of man”:

“A picture or a poem is often little more than a feeble utterance of man’s admiration of something out of himself; but architecture approaches more to a creation of his own, born of his necessities, and expressive of his nature. It is also, in some sort, the work of the whole race, while the picture or statue is the work of one man only, in most cases more highly gifted than his fellows.”

So it is to be expected that all good architecture will express “some great truths commonly belonging to the whole race and necessary to be understood or felt by them in all their work that they do under the sun”. The building then becomes “a book of various knowledge, or a mine of precious thought”,<sup>316</sup> and one must be able to read “a building as we would read Milton or Dante”.<sup>317</sup>

because "the art . . . of any country is an exact exponent of its ethical life";<sup>318</sup> "all good architecture is the expression of national life and character".<sup>319</sup> It is also "the expression by man of his own rest in the statues of the lands that gave him birth".<sup>320</sup> But even more than its geography, it expresses its history: "We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her." So our duty is, on the one hand, piously to preserve the architectural heritage of the past, and, on the other, "to render the architecture of the day, historical", particularly in public buildings, which should carry no ornamentation "without some intellectual intention".<sup>321</sup> The study of the monuments of the past could not, therefore, be purely aesthetic and detached, and Ruskin assures us that his researches into the stones of Venice present "an interest of a far higher kind than that usually belonging to architectural investigations".<sup>322</sup>

No doubt Ruskin's approach was idealistic. His constant purpose was to consider art "in its relation with the *inner spirit of the age*",<sup>323</sup> that is, to explain one superstructure by another superstructure. Morris, while he faithfully adopted Ruskin's outlines, quite naturally replaced this idealistic approach by that which historical materialism provided. The motive force of history was no longer man's moral conscience, but the class struggle. He made this transformation so spontaneously that he was not aware of the fundamental difference of attitude and even attributed his own point of view to Ruskin:

"The essence of what Ruskin taught us," he writes, "was simple enough, like all great discoveries. It was really nothing more recondite than this, that the art of any epoch must of necessity be the expression of its *social life*." <sup>324</sup>

These two formulations, brought together in this way, seem to me to be particularly revealing. Morris's rather purblind enthusiasm has, in effect, given credit to the idea that his socialist vision of history existed in embryo in his master Ruskin (and we have seen how Mackail hastened to spread this tendentious view). On the other hand, Morris, by adopting intact the division of history practised by Ruskin, did not perceive that he was borrowing nothing but a formal framework and that the concepts bounded by this framework, even though he took them too, underwent "a sea-change, into something rich and strange".<sup>325</sup>

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We now come to Ruskin's best known texts, (and if I may be excused for briefly recalling it), to that marvellous fresco of the history of art, *The Stones of Venice*, a fresco designed to establish the primacy of aesthetic and human values displayed by mediaeval art. This Gothic art is the antithesis both of Greek art and of that of the Renaissance, which began and precipitated the decadence and degradation of Western civilisation.

Ruskin is less prolix than Morris about ancient art. He established a distinction between the "constitutional ornament" of the Egyptians and Assyrians, in which the artisan enjoyed some small independence in the sense that he could please himself how he combined models, imperfectly executed though rigorously stereotyped, and the "servile ornament" of the Greeks, absolute in

perfection and precision, but consisting only of geometrical forms incapable of expressing anything human:<sup>326</sup> the monotony of the motifs is a measure of the servility to which the artisan was reduced,<sup>327</sup> and his leaf designs, uniformly stylised, were devoid of any feeling of nature.<sup>328</sup> Morris repeats all that at greater length, more vigorously and in greater detail, and his analysis was notably enriched by his constant references to the slave production methods of Attic society.

When he comes to study the Renaissance, Ruskin stays on the level of superstructures and explains the decadence of art by that of religion and morality. Observing the same effects, Morris makes the same condemnations, but he explains the effects in terms of the sharpening of class differentiation, arising from the appearance of the commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie; his analysis, if less eloquent and less lyrical, is certainly more robust and more profound.

For Ruskin, the prime cause is the degeneracy of Catholicism and its impregnation by pagan rationalism and aestheticism, while the new-born Protestantism, although it saved the faith, was bound by the needs of the struggle to adopt a sectarian attitude and to reject art along with "Romanism".<sup>329</sup> Since the period when Raphael "ministered, with applause, to the impious luxury of the Vatican . . . the clear and tasteless poison" of his art "infects with the sleep of infidelity the hearts of millions of Christians".<sup>330</sup> Man has proudly flaunted an ungodly egocentricity. Whereas mediaeval naturalism exalted God's work in a thousand ways the Renaissance artist preferred to use, as his decorative themes, the imitation of man-made objects: armour, plumes, instruments, costume, navigational gear.<sup>331</sup> The exuberance of Gothic foliage disappeared: "the Renaissance frosts came, and all perished".<sup>332</sup> Christianity was professed in art, but paganism was practised.

"In olden times, men used their powers of painting to show the objects of faith; in later times, they used the objects of faith that they might show their powers of painting",

and they put the Madonna and Aphrodite in the same procession.<sup>333</sup> Henceforth, "admiration takes the place of devotion".<sup>334</sup>

This godlessness is expressed as the pride of science, pride in rank and the spirit of order. "The great mistake of the Renaissance schools lay in supposing that science and art were the same things, and that to advance one was necessarily to perfect the other", whereas the domain of art is "much vaster than that of science, as the soul is larger than the material creation".<sup>335</sup> The most striking example is that of the "base pupils of Michael Angelo, who turned heroes' limbs into surgeons' diagrams".<sup>336</sup> Pride in rank cut off art from the people and this art produced for an élite is characterised by "coldness, perfectness of training, incapability of emotion, want of sympathy with the weakness of lower men, blank, hopeless, haughty self-sufficiency". The Renaissance is "rigid, cold, inhuman; incapable of growing, of stooping, of conceding for an instant". Forgetting the human fellowship which inspired Gothic art, the new architecture "was full of insult to the poor in its every line" and eliminated "the rugged cottages of the mountaineers and the fantastic streets of the labouring burgher". Pride mingled with luxury, "not . . . the luxury of the eye; that is a holy luxury", but "the luxury of the body" favoured



by terraces and grottoes, soft comfort and lascivious decoration. The spirit of the Renaissance was "base both in its abstinence and its indulgence", by its rejection of the wholesome joys of nature as by its gross sensuality.<sup>337</sup> Its funerary monuments express a "ghastly struggle of mean pride and miserable terror", and the statues which adorn them "have all the peculiar tendency to posture-making".<sup>338</sup> The popular humour of the Middle Ages has gone, the Renaissance "having silenced the independent language of the operative".<sup>339</sup>

And pride of system, fossilising the universe in formulae, "under the name of philosophy encumbered the minds of the Renaissance schoolmen". Grammar became the first of the sciences and henceforth one devoted oneself in all the arts to "the exclusive study of restraints". Not that Ruskin in the least "underrates the importance or disputes the authority of law"! No one is keener than he upon strict discipline, but he rejects any that "can be reduced to form and system, and is not written upon the heart".<sup>340</sup> The architect accepted the "laws of the five orders" and forgot those "of the ten Commandments".<sup>341</sup> Everything became "philology, logic, rhetoric"; "the end of human existence" was "to be grammatical", and "the one main purpose of the Renaissance artists, in all their work, was to show how much they knew".<sup>342</sup> Painting, "subjected to Raphaellesque rules" was most concerned to observe "proportions expressible in decimal fractions". And so painting remains until today, "and we wonder we have no painters!"<sup>343</sup> The artisan became a simple copyist: he "secured method and finish, and lost, in exchange for them, his soul".<sup>344</sup> The edifice which he had to decorate was nothing more than "a wearisome exhibition of well-educated imbecility."<sup>345</sup> The poetry of stained glass was gone: the builders "left their palaces filled only with cold white light, and in the paleness of their native stones",<sup>346</sup> henceforth we must "bid farewell to colour".<sup>347</sup> Simultaneously there is "a want of thought or of feeling" and "a systematic ugliness".<sup>348</sup> Such is the architecture which brings us from "the Grand Canal to Gower Street",<sup>349</sup> and we "let our architects do the same thing over and over again for three centuries, and expect to be interested by their architecture".<sup>350</sup> So, the inevitable conclusion is: "let us cast out utterly whatever is connected with the Greek, Roman, or Renaissance architecture, in principle or in form". It is

"pagan in its origin, proud and unholy in its revival, paralyzed in its old age . . . invented, as it seems, to make plagiarists of its architects, slaves of its workmen, and sybarites of its inhabitants; an architecture in which intellect is idle, invention impossible but in which all luxury is gratified, and all insolence fortified".<sup>351</sup>

However, Ruskin introduces an important reservation which Morris takes up on his own account and enriches. He makes a distinction between "the requirement of universal perfection" which characterised the Renaissance and its "demands for classical and Roman *forms* of perfection". Architecture immediately foundered, because "perfection is not therein possible" and "because the classical enthusiasm had destroyed the best types of architectural form". But the same was not true of painting and sculpture and the *cinquecento* "produced the noblest masters whom the world ever saw". Renaissance armour did not paralyse the "living limbs" of those "mighty men" "Leonardo

and Michael Angelo, Ghirlandajo and Masaccio, Titian and Tintoretto." The same phenomenon is to be seen in England as in Italy:

"In spite of the rules of the drama we had Shakespeare, and in spite of the rules of art we had Tintoret, – both of them, to this day doing perpetual violence to the vulgar scholarship and dim-eyed proprieties of the multitude."<sup>353</sup>

But these "noble exceptions" for the most part belonged to the first period of the Renaissance.

"Raphael, Leonardo, and Michael Angelo were all trained in the old school; they all had masters who knew the true ends of art, and had reached them."<sup>354</sup>

Morris in his turn was to see a survival of the Gothic spirit in the greatness of certain individuals, and, being more literal and more subtle than Ruskin, was to observe the survival even in Elizabethan architecture.

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The only historical reference point, then, is the Middle Ages. For Ruskin, as Margaret Grennan so accurately observes, this reference "was not, as in Carlyle's case, an isolated adventure, but a repeated pilgrimage to the past". He brought to it a degree of historical knowledge, definitely less deep than Morris's, but, like Morris, he linked this knowledge and this search to more general considerations which built up a body of doctrine, which he himself called "Gothic opinions".<sup>355</sup> It was, moreover, the intuitive element in this exploration of the past which Morris particularly admired:

"By a marvellous inspiration of genius (I can call it nothing else) he attained at one leap to a true conception of mediaeval art which years of minute study had not gained for others. In his chapter in *The Stones of Venice* entitled *On the Nature of Gothic, and the Function of the Workman therein*, he showed us the gulf which lay between us and the Middle Ages. From that time, all was changed; ignorance of the spirit of the Middle Ages was henceforth impossible, except to those who wilfully shut their eyes".

And Morris added that Ruskin's great discovery was "that the social life of the Middle Ages allowed the workman freedom of individual expression, which on the other hand our social life forbids him"<sup>356</sup> – which introduced the same ambiguity of terminology that I have already indicated. Ruskin's considerations were, in fact, much less social than psychological, moral, even religious, and, if Morris accepted his conclusions, he not only secularised them but also translated them into a materialistic language which took account of the economic relationships of the period in question.

This materialist view of history led him, too, to make more realistic judgments upon mediaeval civilisation than did Ruskin. Despite his enthusiasm, he did not hesitate to decry brutality, feudal oppression, superstition, the roughness of manners.<sup>357</sup> There was nothing of this in Ruskin, who saw in the apogee of Venetian art the reflection of Christian faith and morality in the body politic, choosing to ignore the fact that the prosperity of Venice,

from which stemmed its artistic display, was the fruit of cunning and cold calculation; it was entirely by-the-way that he admitted that England's "feudal lords' lightest words were worth men's lives" and that "the blood of the vexed husbandman dropped in the furrows of her fields", but it was to add immediately that there was greater freedom in mediaeval England than in industrial England.<sup>358</sup> He compared "the modern acquisitive power of capital with that of the lance and sword; the only difference being that the levy of black mail in old times was by force, and is now by cozening".<sup>359</sup> But such allusions are rare, and his vision of the Middle Ages is distinctly more idealised than Morris's. For him, as Rosenberg writes, it was "a Gothic paradise lost".<sup>360</sup> He was willing to admit that then, as today, the populace was reduced to servitude, with this difference however, that it was not then hungry, but plentifully fed.<sup>361</sup> These material details rarely engage his attention. The image he presents to us is, first and foremost, an image of beauty and Christian virtue, and, in this sense, his outlook is perhaps closer to Pugin's than to Morris's. In any case, it is to a large extent an escapist viewpoint, aimed at satisfying "this romantic love of beauty, forced to seek in history, and in external nature, the satisfaction it cannot find in ordinary life".<sup>362</sup> His imagination takes pleasure in evoking "the pleasant flat land . . . garden ground covered with flowers, and divided by fragrant hedges, with a castle in the middle of it".<sup>363</sup> The towns are no less fascinating:

"I am not aware of any town of wealth and importance in the Middle Ages, in which some proof does not exist that, at its period of greatest energy and prosperity, its streets were inwrought with rich sculpture and even . . . glowing with colour and with gold."<sup>364</sup>

Domestic architecture in no way lagged behind that of public places:

"every dwelling-house in the Middle Ages was rich with the same ornaments and quaint with the same grotesques which fretted the porches or animated the gargoyles of the cathedral",

and in these there continued naturally "a style which was familiar to every eye throughout all its lanes and streets".<sup>365</sup> The towns were remarkable as much for the splendour of their palaces as for the exquisite decoration of even the smallest tenements."<sup>366</sup> His descriptions never for a moment include any hint of poverty or, above all, of ugliness.

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It seems unnecessary for us to linger here over the detailed and sometimes very technical study of the forms of Gothic art which Ruskin made. It was certainly precious to Morris, influencing his aesthetic vision and his decorative work. However, it is not superfluous to mention that, even at the time when he still wished to be Ruskin's faithful echo, he never felt it necessary publicly to reiterate these formal considerations. Through seeing Morris merely as a wholehearted disciple of the master, and nothing more, the critics, with disconcerting unanimity, have failed to recognise that an absolutely capital change of stress had taken place during the transmission of the message. In



truth there is, with both of them, what we might call a Gothic utopism, but it is not the same with both.

Let us start again with Ruskin's thought:

"Gothic architecture has external forms and internal elements . . . And unless both the elements and the forms are there, we have no right to call the style Gothic." <sup>367</sup>

Certainly the form is nothing without the content, and he condemns the 'Gothic revival' of the nineteenth century in terms which Morris would approve without reservation:

"The stirring which has taken place in our architectural aims and interests within these few years, is thought by many to be full of promise: I trust it is, but it has a sickly look to me. I cannot tell whether it be indeed a springing of seed or a shaking among bones; and I do not think the time will be lost which I ask the reader to spend on the inquiry, how far all that we have hitherto ascertained or conjectured to be best in principle, may be formally practised without the spirit or the vitality which alone could give it influence, value, or delightfulness."

Ruskin has no doubt that Gothic must be copied, but the whole problem remains: "How is the imitation to be rendered healthy and vital?" <sup>368</sup> He feels repelled by "so-called Gothic or Romanesque buildings" which "are now rising every day around us", and which serve only "to caricature the noble buildings of past ages, and to bring their form into dishonour by leaving out their soul". <sup>369</sup> He had his most striking example of this obsession one day, when, passing through Ealing, he came across a public house built in "Italian Gothic, in the style of its best time". What is one to think of a nation, he exclaims, "which thus delights itself in the defilement and degradation of all the best gifts of its God; which mimics the architecture of Christians to promote the trade of poisoners?" <sup>370</sup> I note, *en passant*, that Morris, who had no time either for religion or for temperance, did not feel any comparable indignation when he affectionately admired the old inn in Dorchester, transformed in the twenty-second century into a guest house and which "still had the Fleur-de-luce which it used to bear in the days when hospitality had to be bought and sold". <sup>371</sup> The spirit of ancient art was quite a different thing for him, even if it was also as Ruskin defined it.

But for the latter it seems not sufficient to recapture the spirit, because the spirit is inseparable from the forms which it is just as necessary to preserve in any "future applicability to the wants of mankind". <sup>372</sup> Of course, he insists upon the essential merit of Gothic forms "capable of perpetual novelty". It is "the only rational architecture, as being that which can fit itself most easily to all services, vulgar or noble . . . subtle and flexible like a fiery serpent, but ever attentive to the voice of the charmer". <sup>373</sup> It is, he says again, "the glory of Gothic architecture that it can do *anything*. Whatever you really and seriously want, Gothic will do for you . . . It is its pride to accommodate itself to your needs". <sup>374</sup> None the less, despite all its adaptability and its infinite diversity, it, too, has its canons, and there can never be any question of abandoning them: "the two great Gothic forms, the pointed arch and gable roof . . . ought to be introduced into modern domestic architecture". <sup>375</sup> What is more, Ruskin

does not propose an imitation of the general characteristics of Gothic, but that of a very special aspect of it:

"I have now no doubt that the only style proper for modern northern work, is the Northern Gothic of the thirteenth century, as exemplified in England, pre-eminently by the cathedrals of Lincoln and Wells, and, in France, by those of Paris, Amiens, Chartres, Rheims, and Bourges, and by the transepts of that of Rouen." <sup>376</sup>

All things considered, even more precisely, his choice is restricted and centred only on early English Gothic, shunning any deviation towards Perpendicular, borrowing perhaps a few decorative elements from French Gothic. <sup>377</sup> It is true that Ruskin's tastes tended to vary, and, a few years later, after asserting his conviction that "it will be impossible for us, not only to equal, but far to surpass, in some respects, any Gothic yet seen in Northern countries", he proposed that we "adopt the pure and perfect forms of the Northern Gothic, and work them out with the Italian refinement". <sup>378</sup> At all events, the gothic mode of architecture should become universal. It should not be just an ecclesiastical form. It is a scandal that our churches should be Gothic and our houses not: "it signifies neither more nor less than that you separated your religion from your life". <sup>379</sup> It will, then, be necessary to "henceforth build alike the church, the palace, and the cottage", and, above all, revert to this style "for our civil and domestic buildings". <sup>380</sup>

These few examples clearly show Ruskin's intransigence on the question of form. Nothing is further from the attitude of Morris, who, on the one hand, expressly declares his complete ignorance about what the forms of future art will be and contents himself with indicative suggestions, as composite as possible, as solid support for his vision; and who, on the other hand, rejects any pure and simple imitation of the past, regarding it as impossible and absurd, and placing the Gothic inspiration in a dialectical perspective, utterly foreign to the spirit of Ruskin and deriving directly from Marxist methodology. This, it seems to me, is what one must understand as implicit in the conclusion of Morris's preface to *The Nature of Gothic*:

"Some readers will perhaps wonder that in this important Chapter of Ruskin I have found it necessary to consider the ethical and political, rather than what would ordinarily be thought, the artistic side of it. I must answer that, delightful as is that portion of Ruskin's work which describes, analyses, and criticizes art, old and new, yet this is not, alter all the most characteristic side of his writings." <sup>381</sup>

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So, contrary to established ideas, it is not in Ruskin's formal aesthetics that one should seek Morris's inspiration, but rather in his definitions of the internal elements that constitute "the nature of Gothic". There, in his eyes, lies the kernel of Ruskin's analysis, and we witness its germination (though in a very different soil) in Morris's aesthetics and social ethic.

First, let us note a curious fact which prepared the ground for this germination. Whereas, by its very intent, *The Stones of Venice* studies Mediterranean

Gothic, the famous chapter VI of book II, *The Nature of Gothic*, constitutes a real parenthesis, even an antithesis or contradiction. This chapter, in fact, which sets out to be an analysis of the general characteristics of mediaeval art in all climates, is overtly an apologia for northern Gothic and a proclamation of its superiority. Ruskin invites the reader to examine with him "this grey, shadowy many-pinnacled image of the Gothic spirit within us; and discerning what fellowship there is between it and our Northern hearts".<sup>382</sup> Gothic art is, before anything, the

"outspeaking of the strong spirit of men who may not gather redundant fruitage from the earth, nor bask in dreamy benignity of sunshine, but must break the rock for bread, and cleave the forest for fire".<sup>383</sup>

One sees in it "the habit of hard and rapid working; the industry of the tribes of the North . . . as opposed to the languor of the Southern tribes",<sup>384</sup>

"strength of will, independence of character, resoluteness of purpose, impatience of undue control, and that general tendency to set the individual reason against authority, and the individual deed against destiny, which, in the Northern tribes, has opposed itself throughout all ages, to the languid submission, in the Southern, of thought to tradition, and purpose to fatality".<sup>385</sup>

Such a definition was bound to please Morris, a man of the north by temperament and by choice, who had been horribly bored in Italy, to the great despair of Burne-Jones. But this same definition led Ruskin, in a completely inconsequential generalisation, to consider that the fundamental characteristic of Gothic art was its harshness, its "savageness".

It is this characteristic unjustly despised during the centuries of classicism which "deserves our profoundest reverence".<sup>386</sup> But there again Ruskin's thought is not absolutely precise, because he tends to confuse two concepts which are far from being identical: on the one hand, Nordic harshness; on the other, the right to be imperfect, the only common element being vitality. It is finally on the second of these concepts that his thought and lyricism dwell in pages too well known for us to analyse them in detail here. What it is important for us to observe, because there the direction of thought is radically different between Morris and Ruskin, is that, for the latter, the point of departure is theological. Perfection belongs to God alone:

"If we pretend to have reached either perfection or satisfaction, we have degraded ourselves and our work. God's work only may express that; but ours may never have that sentence written upon it, — 'And behold, it was very good'." <sup>387</sup>

The fall of Adam made man an imperfect being, who must accept the "admission of lost power and fallen nature". The greatness of Gothic art lies in its being a Christian art, and Christianity, while it admits human imperfection, recognises "the individual value of every soul".<sup>388</sup> Note, in passing, the Protestant inflexibility which Ruskin thus bestows upon mediaeval religion. Only the art of the Middle Ages has given this "individual value" the chance of asserting itself. Whereas the pagans of Antiquity and the Renaissance had kept the artisan to the servility of the copyist, forcing him to reproduce perfect



and meaningless motifs, preferring "the perfectness of the lower nature to the imperfections of the higher",<sup>389</sup> Gothic art allowed him, with his limited means, to deploy all the force of his imagination and his sensibility, and from all these unpolished fragments emerged "a stately and unaccusable whole".<sup>390</sup>

"This is the glory of Gothic architecture, that every jot and tittle, every point and niche of it, affords room, fuel, and focus for individual fire."<sup>391</sup>

Observe, however, that this liberty is relative and is confined to execution. In a somewhat curious passage of *The Stones of Venice*, which touches the limits of contradiction, Ruskin suddenly reveals his need of hierarchy, authority, inequality. In the mediaeval system, he writes, "the mind of the inferior workman is recognised, and he has full room for action, but is guided and ennobled by the ruling mind". The rôle of the architect is to "calculate only on the co-operation of inferior men, to think for them, and to indicate for some of them at least such expressions of your thoughts as the weakest capacity can comprehend and the feeblest hand can execute". Mediaeval achievements are "the expressions of the mind of manhood by the hands of childhood".<sup>392</sup> Morris avoided language of this sort. He did cherish some illusions common to the majority of nineteenth-century mediaevalists, and described the unknown foreman of works of the mediaeval cathedrals, lost amidst the mass of the workers, stressing the gulf which separated him from the bureaucratic and commercial architect of today. In his utopia, when he took up the Ruskinian theme of freedom of expression in work, he took it for granted that the English people of the twenty-second century would express the newly recovered youthfulness of the world with brains and hands alike adult.

Although he remained proof against Ruskin's theological arguments nevertheless Morris followed him in his conclusions. Breaking with the Christian tradition of Gothic art, "the modern English mind has this much in common with that of the Greek, that it intensely desires, in all things, the utmost completion or perfection compatible with their nature". Industrialised England, instead of making a man of the worker by accepting his inevitable and innate imperfection, reduced him to the level of a mere machine, "an animated tool". In demanding the precision of cogwheel and compass from workers "you must unhumanize them". After ten hours in the factory, they are, mentally, nothing more than "a heap of sawdust". The admirably finished products of modern England are "signs of a slavery . . . a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek". The strength of the multitudes "is given daily to be washed into the fineness of a web, or racked into the exactness of a line". The contrast is striking when we look at the facade of a cathedral which displays "the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being . . . which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children".<sup>393</sup>

"We have much studied and much perfected, of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labour; only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men: – Divided into more segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough

to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail . . . ; if we could only see with what crystal sand their points were polished, – sand of human soul . . . – we should think that there is some loss in it also.”<sup>394</sup>

This division of labour, this dividing up of a man, is seen again in another form in the barrier which has been set up between the brain which conceives and the hand which executes, arising from the prejudice which despises manual labour. However, “one man’s thoughts can never be expressed by another”:

“We are always in these days endeavouring to separate the two; we want one man to be always thinking and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen in the best sense . . . The mass of society is made up of morbid thinkers, and miserable workers. Now it is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity . . . All professions should be liberal . . . In each several profession, no master should be too proud to do its hardest work. The painter should grind his own colours; the architect work in the mason’s yard with his men; the master-manufacturer be himself a more skilful operative than any man in his mills . . .”<sup>395</sup>

And the final form of this fragmentation of man is the total cleavage and opposition between professional life and domestic life. The heart of the worker “cannot go into the form of cogs and compasses, but expands, after the ten hours are over, into fireside humanity”.<sup>396</sup>

The antithesis of this division of labour and of the worker is Gothic art, in which “there is perpetual change, both in design and execution”.<sup>397</sup> The result is continuing joy both for the craftsman and for those who look at his work, because

“we must no more expect to derive either pleasure or profit from an architecture whose ornaments are of one pattern, and whose pillars are of one proportion, than we should out of a universe in which the clouds were all of one shape, and the trees all of one size”.<sup>398</sup>

Were they not too well known, it would be necessary to quote at length from the admirable pages in which Ruskin describes the infinite diversity of Gothic ornamentation, the capitals of the Palace of the Doges, each one a marvel of invention, the pillars and facades displaying an absence of symmetry that is both fantastic and harmonious. The joy of those who contemplate echoes the joy of the creator who can apply in his work, in all directions, all the resources of his personality.

So it is only through the ending of the division of labour, in diversity of occupation, that the reconciliation of the worker with his task becomes possible. The “universal outcry” which today goes up from factories does not arise, claims Ruskin (and I shall return to this point), from famine or social inequality, but from the fact that the workers “have no pleasure in the work by which

they make their bread".<sup>399</sup> Allowing the internal contradiction between his Protestantism and his aesthetic sensuality to burst forth, Ruskin here resolutely breaks with Carlyle and refuses to believe that it is work itself which is subject to the original curse. "It is written, 'in the sweat of thy brow', but it was never written 'in the breaking of thine heart', thou shalt eat bread."<sup>400</sup> Work must be a joy or there is no justification for it:

"I believe the right question to ask, respecting all ornament, is simply this: Was it done with enjoyment – was the carver happy while he was about it? It may be the hardest work possible, and the harder because so much pleasure was taken in it; but it must have been happy too, or it will not be living."<sup>401</sup>

That is what Morris considers to be essential in Ruskin's message. When he, in his turn, develops the theme of pleasure in work, he excuses himself for not being able to be more than "an echo of his words".<sup>402</sup> Art, he repeats, "is man's expression of his joy in labour", and he adds:

"If those are not Professor Ruskin's words they embody at least his teaching on this subject. Nor has truth more important ever been stated."<sup>403</sup>

This is the major theme of his utopia, and when he published the chapter, *On the Nature of Gothic*, at the Kelmscott Press, it was essentially to acknowledge his debt to Ruskin on the point, as he wrote in his preface:

"For the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, for, strange as it may seem to us today, there have been times when he did rejoice in it."<sup>404</sup>

Ruskin goes a very long way in this direction, and sketches an idea, which Morris developed at length, when he declares:

"Play is an exertion of body or mind, made to please ourselves, and with no determined end; and work is a thing done because it ought to be done, and with a determined end. You play, as you call it, at cricket, for instance. That is as hard work as anything else; but it amuses you, and it has no result but the amusement. If it were done as an ordered form of exercise, for health's sake, it would become work directly."<sup>405</sup>

I do not know whether Morris read this text, but it contains the germ of all his utopian thought on the suppression of the contradiction between work and leisure. Man does not draw back in the face of any effort, and even undertakes it voluntarily when he has the joy of being able to express his intelligence and sensibility in what he is doing, and it is from this joy that beauty and art are naturally born. Ruskin distinguishes two kinds of beauty:

"First, that external quality of bodies . . . which, whether it occur in a stone, a flower, beast or in man, is absolutely identical, which . . . may be shown to be in some sort typical of the Divine attributes and which therefore I shall . . . call Typical Beauty; and, secondarily, the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more es-



pecially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man; and this kind of beauty I shall call Vital Beauty.”<sup>406</sup>

Morris was careful not to reproduce this phraseology, but he thought with Ruskin that beauty results from the full exercise of human functions. It derives from that that the notion of beauty is inseparable from the notion of usefulness.

“A good spire or porch retains the first idea of a roof usefully covering a space, as a Norman high cap or elongated Quaker’s bonnet retains the original idea of a simple covering for the head; and any extravagance of subsequent fancy may be permitted, so long as the notion of use is not altogether lost.”<sup>407</sup>

Ruskin praises the Gothic builders for never having accepted that artificial needs of symmetry should prevent a building fulfilling its practical use, and for having, without bothering about conventions, put in a window, added a room, built a pillar where it was needed: the general effect was never spoiled.<sup>408</sup>

“We require from buildings, as from men, two kinds of goodness: first doing their practical duty well: then they can be graceful and pleasing in doing it; which last itself is another form of duty.”<sup>409</sup>

However it must be admitted that, on this point, Ruskin does not shine with coherent logic. Just a few pages further on, he stresses, on the contrary, that utility should not be sacrificed to the pleasure of the imagination and that a distinction must be drawn between the aesthetic and the useful.

“And above all, do not try to make all these pleasures reasonable, nor to connect the delight which you take in ornament with that which you take in construction or usefulness. They have no connection . . . Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless; peacocks and lilies for instance.”<sup>410</sup>

Which really is contradicting himself and even forgetting the distinction he had only just established between Vital Beauty and Typical Beauty. What is more, looking more closely and accepting Ruskin’s ideology, is this distinction defensible? Should not typical beauty, from his own point of view, be considered as the vital beauty of nature, a work of God, as “the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function” in that nature? In spite of its religious garb, does not this concept of typical beauty once more betray a passive pagan sensuality existing side by side with active Protestantism which would rather be expressed by the concept of vital beauty? These subtleties and contradictions, which only became painful to Ruskin after the time when his “deconversion” made them more or less conscious, obviously never embarrassed Morris, who, despite his sincere enthusiasm, was always discreetly selective in his acceptance of the heritage of Ruskin and never ceased, strictly and with deepening thoughtfulness, to make an intimate association between art and everyday life.

Even after this inevitable sifting, it must be recognised that the heritage is considerable: a definite vision of the Middle Ages and an understanding of the sources of their vitality; a respect for unpolished work, the greater in that it is the expression of man’s joy in his labour; the necessary diversity of occupation, the source of joy in labour and, consequently, of art; the link between beauty

and usefulness. 'These are the ideal values which need utopia. Industrial civilisation rejects them. What is to be done to get rid of the present alienation of the working class? Ruskin feels that remedies must be provided for the evils he has described. What does he suggest? We must, he says, get rid of machines, but we do not know when or how. Despite his unhappy attempts with the Guild of St. George, he did not, properly speaking, establish a real theory of the labouring class. What he essentially suggested (and this gave Morris ample food for thought) was "a right understanding, on the part of all classes, of what kinds of labour are good for men, raising them, and making them happy" and also "a determined sacrifice of such convenience, or beauty, or cheapness as is only to be got by the degradation of the workman, and . . . equally determined demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour".<sup>411</sup>

These demands, thus presented as immediate, could only, for Morris, remain pious hopes. He certainly retained them, but it was his assimilation of historical materialism which gave them revolutionary consistency. They would be satisfied, not through the acquisition of religious and moral conscience, but through a liberation founded upon an understanding of material needs and the laws of social evolution.

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But is there, in Ruskin's work, any attempt to anticipate, any utopian intent? If one exists, it is no more than a passing hint. He writes, for example, in words which are reasonably typical of his attitude: "The advance from the days of Edward I to our own, great as it is confessedly, consists, not so much in what we have actually accomplished, as in what we are now able to conceive".<sup>412</sup> In fact, nothing of what he does conceive constitutes a deliberate and definite looking towards the future: a course in morality, even when it sets out to be political, does not constitute a system of reform or a utopia. He himself quite realises this, and refuses to go any further:

". . . in a science dealing with so subtle elements as those of human nature, it is only possible to answer for the final truth of principles, not for the direct success of plans: and . . . in the best of these last, what can be immediately accomplished is always questionable, and what can be finally accomplished, inconceivable".<sup>413</sup>

Note, in passing, this abstract and speculative belief in an unchanging "human nature", a belief totally contrary to the precise Marxist concept of Morris. "The human life of all time . . . that human nature which is indeed constant enough . . . the heart, which is the same in all ages," says Ruskin.<sup>414</sup> If man, who is his principal care, is unchangeable, is there any point in worrying about his earthly future? What matters is the salvation of his soul. All efforts in this direction must disdain the reproach of utopism. One must keep within the bounds of the possible, but merit will lie in effort rather than in success:

"Quixotism, or Utopianism; that is another of the devil's pet words. I believe the quiet admission which we are all of us so ready to make, that,

because things have long been wrong, it is impossible they should ever be right, is one of the most fatal sources of misery and crime from which this world suffers. Whenever you hear a man dissuading you from attempting to do well, on the ground that perfection is 'Utopian', beware of that man. Cast the word out of your dictionary altogether. There is no need for it. Things are either possible or impossible – you can easily determine which, in any given state of human science. If the thing is impossible, you need not trouble yourselves about it; if possible, try for it. It is very Utopian to hope for the entire doing away with drunkenness and misery out of the Canongate; but the Utopianism is not our business – the *work* is. It is Utopian to hope to give every child in this kingdom the knowledge of God from its youth; but the Utopianism is not our business – the *work* is."<sup>415</sup>

That is all very vague. The aims are ill-defined, and, to use Babeuf's phrase, Ruskin leaves the means blank. We must find another approach than the examination of explicit declarations in order to lay bare the essence of his thought about an ideal society; and the approach I have in mind holds a particular interest for us. One is struck, reading *The Stones of Venice*, by the expression of a nostalgia for childhood, which is to be found again in Morris. Speaking of false pleasures, artificial needs and vain knowledge introduced by the Renaissance, Ruskin writes, referring to the persistence of such temptations:

"This we are exposed to chiefly in the fact of our ceasing to be children. For the child does not seek false pleasure; its pleasures are true, simple, and instinctive."<sup>416</sup>

All men, he says again in a similar context, "look back to the days of childhood as of greatest happiness, because those were the days of greatest wonder, greatest simplicity, and most vigorous imagination";<sup>417</sup> and finally: "It is the child's spirit, which we are most happy when we most recover."<sup>418</sup>

These reflections, which cast a light for us upon Ruskin's mediaeval vision, should be set beside a passage of *Modern Painters* which is a paraphrase of them and which gives us a key to his latent utopism:

"If we ever become wise enough to dress consistently and gracefully, to make health a principal object in education, and to render our streets beautiful with art, the external charm of past history will in great measure disappear . . . Whatever external charm attaches itself to the past, would then be seen in proper subordination to the brightness of present life; and the elements of romance would exist, in the earlier ages, only in the attraction which must generally belong to whatever is unfamiliar; In the reverence which a noble nation always pays to its ancestors; and in the enchanted light which races, like individuals, must perceive in looking back to the days of their childhood."<sup>419</sup>

All these texts clearly suggest that for Ruskin the golden age lies not in the future, but in the mediaeval past. The "if ever . . ." which introduces the last exposition has the note of pleasant hypothesis and poetic projection. Soon we shall see all that lies beneath all this nostalgia for the Middle Ages, quite aside from the problem of artistic creation. For the moment we will be content with



the observation that these thoughts of Ruskin's perhaps provided fodder for Morris's theme of the renewed youth of the world. However, with Morris it is not empty nostalgia, but a shout of triumph inspired by a reasoned certainty of achievement, and this renewed youth will not be a *cyclic* repetition of earlier youth, but the youth proper to a new world, achieved at a much higher level in the historical *spiral*, as defined by Engels.

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One fact, however, is incontestable, and today it is difficult for us to measure the extent of it: that is the extraordinary influence which Ruskin exerted upon different strata of the population in the direction of embracing socialism. We must not forget that he provoked a scandal in his generation as Morris did in his, and that, under the pressure of Victorian opinion, Thackeray had to suspend publication of *Unto this Last* in the *Cornhill Magazine* and Froude that of *Munera Pulveris* in *Prazer's Magazine*.

In his preface to *The Nature of Gothic*, Morris notes that a book like *Unto this Last* had "the most enduring and beneficent effect on his contemporaries" and that "John Ruskin, the teacher of morals and politics . . . has done serious and solid work towards the new birth of Society".<sup>420</sup> Belfort Bax, in a *Commonweal* article entitled *The Commercial Hearth*, violently took to task the young bourgeois enraptured with Ruskinian ideology, and his invective does not lack interest:

"Your societies of St. George, your aesthetic movements, etc. . . , only touch a fringe of the well-to-do classes: they have no root in the life of the present day; and because they have no root, they wither away and in a few years remain dried up between the pages of history, to mark the place of mistaken enthusiasm and abortive energies. It is surely time that these excellent young people, together with their beloved prophet, descended for a while from their mound of Ruskinian transfiguration, with its rolling masses of vaporous sentiment, to the prosaic ground of economic science, and saw things as they are."

This was too much for William Morris, who would not agree to publish this article without adding a note of protest in which he declared that Ruskin "has shown such insight even into economical matters, and I am sure he has *made many Socialists*".<sup>421</sup> Our poet was convinced that, among the middle classes, "most of those who are worth anything have been touched by Ruskin's writings and converted into Socialists of some kind",<sup>422</sup> and, in the course of an interview "he remarked that Mr. Ruskin's influence in the propagation of Socialism was far from small . . . especially conspicuous in Edinburgh, where there is a Students' Socialist Society".<sup>423</sup> The only circle which appears to have remained unaffected by Ruskin's influence was the Fabian Society and that, we are told by Pease, the historian of the movement, was "by reaction against his religious mediaevalism, and indifference to his gospel of art"; he adds, not without disdain: "Books so eminently adapted for young ladies at mid-Victorian schools did not appeal to modernists educated by Comte and Spencer".<sup>424</sup> Note in passing, that it would need a long study (and this is not the place for it) in order to list all Morris's reasons for hostility towards the

Fabians. However, Bernard Shaw, in an appendix to Pease's book, assures us that "here and there in the Socialist movement workmen turned up who had read *Fors Clavigera* or *Unto this Last*; and some of the more well-to-do no doubt had read the first chapter of *Munera Pulveris*".<sup>425</sup> And here we really do have a remarkable phenomenon. Morris was surprised to discover "such a hearty feeling toward John Ruskin among working-class audiences: they can see the prophet in him rather than the fantastic rhetorician, as more superfine audiences do".<sup>426</sup> In the columns of *Commonweal* itself, he was able to publish letters from obscure militants, such as that of George Sturt, who wrote that he owed his being a socialist to Ruskin.<sup>427</sup> In the marvellously documented and, unhappily unfinished study of Tom Mann, which Dona Torr left us before she died, she provided us with a number of similar pieces of evidence.<sup>428</sup> Burt, the miners' M.P., had, in his youth, walked nearly twenty miles on each occasion to spend his few shillings on the four numbers of *The Cornhill Magazine* which contained the next chapters of *Unto this Last*. Dona Torr quotes the case of a worker who, being unable to buy this book, copied it out from end to end. Tom Mann himself knew whole passages of Ruskin by heart and, she tells us, it was his reading of Ruskin which prepared him for that of Marx, a remark which is just as valid where Morris is concerned.

It is difficult today to imagine such success for Ruskin among the working-class public. To understand it, one must take into account that, at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, socialist literature proper was scanty and of a feeble theoretical calibre. The works of Marx and Engels were only translated into English very late on and in very small numbers. Morris himself was only able to read *Capital* thanks to his knowledge of French. Any book showing any understanding of the workers' cause was seized upon. Such works were, for the most part, by bourgeois writers whose ideology was far from being specifically working-class. But the occurrence was so rare in this generally reactionary society that all the contradictions were readily forgiven and even the slightest expression of sympathy was passionately and selectively treasured. It really does seem that this phenomenon of selective reading was a characteristic of the period, and is not Morris himself a striking example of it? There is another factor to be taken into account. This religious ideology and even the theological argumentation, which run through all Ruskin's writings and are so foreign to modern socialism, were not at all distasteful and seemed normal to a working class which was still deeply Christian and whose ways of expression were strongly affected by Sunday preaching and ecclesiastical literature.

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One would not think of denying that Ruskin's work is saturated by a feeling of commiseration, paternalist and distant perhaps, but none the less sincere and ardent, for the lot of the working class; and the magic of his style expresses this sentiment in unforgettable ways that are almost incantations. He expresses "the animation of her multitudes . . . sent like fuel to feed the factory smoke", "their universal outcry against wealth, and against nobility", the degradation to which mechanical overexertion subjects workers:

"But to feel their souls withering within them, unthanked, to find their whole being sunk into an unrecognised abyss, to be counted off into a heap of mechanism numbered with its wheels, and weighed with its hammer strokes – this, nature bade not, – this, God blesses not, – this, humanity for no long time is able to endure."

In the nineteenth century, few voices denounced the dehumanisation of work with such power and brilliance:

"The great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this, – that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages."<sup>429</sup>

Ruskin even had a growing realisation of the historical importance of the working class: "More and more I perceive, as my old age opens to me the deeper secrets of human life, that the true story and strength of that world are the story and strength of these helots and slaves."<sup>430</sup> And he also had a naive and, one must say, typically bourgeois worship of the working class. He exclaims about its saintliness, its perfection, its purity:

"Strange words to be used of working people! 'What! holy; without any long robes or anointing oils; these rough-jacketed, rough-worded persons; set to nameless dishonoured service? Perfect! – these, with dim eyes and cramped limbs, and slowly wakening minds? Pure! – these, with sensual desire and grovelling thought; foul of body and coarse of soul?' It may be so; nevertheless, such as they are, they are the holiest, perfectest, purest persons the earth can at present show. They may be what you have said; but if so, they yet are holier than we who have left them thus".

Nevertheless, this naive worship was accompanied by strange advice which must have left the working-class readers of *Unto this Last* somewhat bemused:

"The rich not only refuse food to the poor; they refuse wisdom; they refuse virtue; they refuse salvation. Ye sheep without shepherd, it is not the pasture that has been shut from you, but the Presence. Meat! perhaps your right to that may be pleadable; but other rights have to be pleaded first. Claim your crumbs from the table if you will; but claim them as children, not as dogs; claim your right to be fed, but claim more loudly your right to be holy, perfect and pure."<sup>431</sup>

This exaltation of the human dignity of the worker would surely have come better had it not been accompanied by this supreme disdain for material demands, disdain which by no means indicated hardness of heart but which is obviously the expression of the ignorance and the illusions of a bourgeois lacking real contact with the people.<sup>432</sup> Let us reread this famous passage, to which I have already referred, from *The Stones of Venice*:

"Their universal outcry against wealth, and against nobility, is not forced from them either by the pressure of famine, or the sting of mor-



tified pride . . . It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread . . . It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own.”<sup>433</sup>

When one thinks of the fearful conditions of life of the English proletariat in the nineteenth century, when one rereads the accounts of Engels, of Mayhew, of Booth or the Hammonds, this mis-placing of stress has something shocking about it. Nothing is further from the thinking of William Morris, who was better informed, not only through his reading but through his militant experience, who waxed indignant at these idealistic preachings and declared that the achievement of dignity and art by the worker is primarily “a knife and fork matter”. Ruskin’s obtuseness seems to have no limit. The needy readers of his works must have made great call upon the selective fervour to which I referred when they read:

“I will even go so far as to say that we ought not to get books too cheaply. No book, I believe, is ever worth half so much to its reader as one that has been coveted for a year at a bookstall, and bought out of saved halfpence; and perhaps a day or two’s fasting.”<sup>434</sup>

Nor can one help being struck by Ruskin’s social terminology. He does speak of upper class and lower class, but this word class is not frequent and has no precision. He more readily speaks of idlers and workers, but the words which come most often to his pen are those of masters and servants,<sup>435</sup> which really is a sign of a lack of direct grasp of the reality of his times, and, also, of a singularly archaic attitude.

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We find the same vagueness (and the word is scarcely strong enough) when he attempts to touch upon the history of exploitation, which he calls “the pillage of the worker by the idler”: according to him, exploiters were, first, landlords; then, soldiers, lawyers, and priests; finally, merchants and usurers.<sup>436</sup> Obviously we are a very long way from the strict definitions which Morris borrowed from Marx and Engels. Despite all this lack of theoretical clarity (and it would be a long task to compile a complete list) one cannot escape the conclusion that, throughout Ruskin’s work, attacks and criticisms mount up against the industrial bourgeoisie and the way of life it forced upon England. With incomparable eloquence, he expressed the general feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration. “From John Ruskin to the Dock-labourer,” writes Morris, “all are discontented.”<sup>437</sup> And looking back in the last years of his life, he exclaims: “How deadly dull the world would have been twenty years ago, but for Ruskin! It was through him that I learned to give form to my discontent.”<sup>438</sup> “His *feeling against Commercialism*,” he says further, “is absolutely genuine and his expression of it most valuable.”<sup>439</sup>

Many expressions used by Ruskin were re-used by Morris, as, for example the comparison of the injustices of “the morbid power of manufacture and commerce” with “those of the gambling-house”,<sup>440</sup> as the observation that “commodities are made to be sold and not to be consumed”,<sup>441</sup> and many

more which we shall discover in the exposition of certain ideas often expressed by Ruskin. It is even not too much to say that concepts taken from Marx are often expressed by Morris in the language of Ruskin, which possibly is an extenuating circumstance in the blindness of certain critics. And we must not neglect the fact that certain of Marx's descriptions are to be found in embryonic state in Ruskin. This is true, as we shall see, about the division of labour. It is also true about the accumulation of riches at one extreme and poverty at the other.

"Mercantile economy," wrote Ruskin, "... signifies the accumulation in the hands of individuals, of legal or moral claim upon, or power over, the labour of others; every such claim implying precisely as much poverty or debt on one side, as it implies riches or right on the other."<sup>442</sup>

Obviously we are a very long way from the extraordinary investigations of *Capital*, but we cannot deny the existence, upon certain points, of a similarity of matter, such as to favour looseness of vocabulary, all the more understandable because Morris, addressing the public at large, naturally made use of simpler formulations than those of Marx's scientific analyses.

In his attacks against the *laissez-faire* of the industrial bourgeoisie, Ruskin multiplies his hammer-blows: "the art of becoming 'rich', in the common sense, is not absolutely nor finally the art of accumulating much money for ourselves, but also of contriving that our neighbours shall have less;<sup>443</sup> "robbing the poor because he is poor, is especially the mercantile form of theft, consisting in taking advantage of a man's necessities in order to obtain his labour or property at a reduced price".<sup>444</sup> He sees two kinds of individual in society: the pluses and the minuses:

"... the pluses make a very positive and venerable appearance in the world, so that everyone is eager to learn the science which produces results so magnificent; whereas the minuses have, on the other hand, a tendency to retire into back streets and other places of shade, – or even to get themselves wholly and finally put out of sight in graves."<sup>445</sup>

Addressing the theoreticians of vulgar utilitarianism, he says: "You have founded an entire Science of Political Economy, on what you have stated to be the constant instinct of man – the desire to defraud his neighbour."<sup>446</sup> The business men who are the men of the hour are:

"men who conceive the proper state of the world to be simply that of a vast and disorganised mob, scrambling each for what he can get, trampling down the children and old men in the mire, and doing what work it finds *must* be done with any irregular squad of labourers it can bribe or inveigle together and afterwards scatter to starvation".<sup>447</sup>

And yet this unemployment to which they are reduced is beyond understanding when one thinks of all the works of public utility which our society should be demanding to assure its basic needs and its health.<sup>448</sup> There is no law against all these abuses, but "proceedings may be legal which are by no means just".<sup>449</sup> In terms which we find repeated almost identically by Marx and by Morris, Ruskin deplores the waste of talent caused by this anarchic competition.

"For aught I know, there may be two or three Leonardo da Vincis employed at this moment in your harbours and railroads: but you are not employing their Leonardesque or golden faculty there, – you are only oppressing and destroying it." <sup>450</sup>

The countryside of modern England is a sinister reflection of these contrasts:

"Our cities are a wilderness of spinning wheels instead of palaces; yet the people have not clothes. We have blackened every leaf of English greenwood with ashes, and the people die of cold; our harbours are a forest of merchant ships, and the people die of hunger." <sup>451</sup>

I could go on indefinitely quoting descriptions of modern towns, where ugliness vies with poverty, and suburbs where pretentious stucco villas have sprung up, what Morris later called "cockney villas" all with names like Mortimer House or Montague Villa. <sup>452</sup>

This bourgeois civilisation horrified Ruskin as much by its hideousness as by its injustice and anarchy, and Morris expressed the same horror. But both of them belonged to the class they condemned, and they could not help showing towards the men they judged so severely an almost painful understanding on the individual level. "They are," wrote Ruskin,

"men capable of compassion, and open to reason, but with personal interests at stake so vast, and with all the gear and mechanism of their acts so involved in the web of past iniquity, that the best of them are helpless, and the wisest blind." <sup>453</sup>

Certain individuals among them attempt to exert a healthy influence upon their workers, and their riches are, according to cases, the "Mammon either of Unrighteousness or Righteousness". <sup>454</sup> In the first years of his life as a militant, Morris, filled with illusions, also appealed to the bourgeoisie, exhorting them to redeem themselves, and, later, tried almost desperately to integrate them into the classless society of his utopia. For Ruskin there was no question of such a prospect nor such an upset of property. The great industrial and financial bourgeoisie had nothing to fear from him, but he implored them, in the fashion of Carlyle but with, perhaps, less certainty, to ensure the regeneration of the world and of themselves:

"What less can we hope from your wealth than this, rich men of England, when once you feel fully how, by the strength of your possessions – not, observe, by the exhaustion, but by the administration of them and the power, – you can direct the acts – command the energies – inform the ignorance – prolong the existence, of the whole human race?" <sup>455</sup>

Whatever the sentimental attachment which Morris retained for his own class, he could not follow Ruskin along that road, and here the break is complete.



Morris entrusted the regeneration of mankind, including the bourgeoisie, to the working class. Carlyle, on the other hand, saw the captains of industry as the saviours of society. Ruskin seemed for a moment to subscribe to this idea. In fact, nothing of the kind. Whereas Carlyle turned to the bourgeoisie because he saw no hope in the old aristocracy, Ruskin showed himself to be, at bottom, much more of a petty-bourgeois Victorian than Carlyle by his snobbery. "There should still," he declares, "be a trenchant distinction of race between nobles and commoners,"<sup>456</sup> and this distinction should be marked by a profound respect on the part of the latter.

"To yield reverence to another, to hold ourselves and our likes at his disposal, is not slavery; often it is the noblest state in which a man can live in this world . . . And therefore, in all ages and in all countries, reverence has been paid and sacrifice made by men to each other, not only without complaint, but rejoicingly; and famine, and peril, and sword, and all evil, and all shame have been borne willingly in causes of masters and kings."<sup>457</sup>

The grandeur of Venice lasted so long as the authority of the Doges was based upon the faithful and resolute support of the aristocracy who elected them and which had been instituted "by its unity and heroism", a unity contrasting with the frightful squabbles and revolutions which rent the whole of Italy at that period.<sup>458</sup> There was the same deplorable contrast between the mediaeval order and modern society:

" . . . of old, the separation between the noble and the poor was merely a wall built by law; now it is a veritable difference of level in standing, a precipice between upper and lower grounds in the field of humanity, and there is a pestilential air at the bottom of it."<sup>459</sup>

This precipice had come into being from the Renaissance onwards; the split was born of impiety, pride in rank and false luxury. The aristocracies of Europe had entrenched themselves in "that insolent and festering isolation, against which the cry of the poor sounded hourly in more ominous union, bursting at last into thunder (mark where, – first among the planted walks and splashing fountains of the palace wherein the Renaissance luxury attained its utmost height in Europe, Versailles.)"<sup>460</sup> Had the English nobility understood this lesson? Ruskin seems to have thought so, because, he writes, it has never "had . . . so much sympathy with the lower [classes] or charity for them".<sup>461</sup> He reminds it that "the first character of all the Nobilities which have founded great dynasties in the world is to be poor",<sup>462</sup> which does not prevent him from asserting, without worrying about inconsistency, that it would be "highly advantageous to the State that a certain number of persons distinguished by race should be permitted to set examples of wise expenditure, whether in the advancement of science, or in patronage of art and literature".<sup>463</sup> But the natural mission of the nobility is not restricted to patronage, and the appeal which Ruskin makes to it is exactly the same as that addressed by Carlyle to the Captains of Industry:

"The people are crying to you for command, and you stand there at pause, and silent. You think they don't want to be commanded; try them

... and they will follow you through fire ... They love their old ways yet, and their old masters, and their old land.”<sup>464</sup>

The name of Ruskin should be associated with the notion of feudal socialism much more appropriately than that of Carlyle. He is the most authentic example of that ideology, which Morris must have brushed aside contemptuously, for his mediaevalism was inspired by the desire to renew links with a popular, democratic and even revolutionary tradition.

For Ruskin, on the contrary, the rôle of the aristocracy was “to keep order among their inferiors, and raise them always to the nearest level with themselves of which those inferiors are capable”.<sup>465</sup> His conception of the world was the transposition, pure and simple, of the mediaeval theological notion of the scale of being. Peace, justice and God’s word, he writes, “*can* only be given by a true Hierarchy and Royalty, beginning at the throne of God, and descending, by sacred stair let down from Heaven, to bless and keep all the Holy creatures of God, man and beast, and to condemn and destroy the unholy”.<sup>466</sup> What makes “the true strength of every human soul is to be dependent upon as many nobler as it can discern, and to be depended upon, by as many inferior as it can reach”.<sup>467</sup> This authoritarian hierarchy is natural and is God’s will: “all human government is nothing else than the executive expression of this Divine authority”.<sup>468</sup> Let every man be aware of this, on pain of coercion: “So the bridle of man is to be the Eye of God; and if he rejects that guidance, then the next best for him is the horse’s and the mule’s, which have no understanding”.<sup>469</sup> Ruskin’s diatribes against any separation of Church and State, and his ideas about the religious rôle of officials,<sup>470</sup> give a frankly theocratic appearance to his ideology.

Thus obedience is the greatest virtue: “any form of government will work, provided the governors are real, and the people obey them”.<sup>471</sup> All means are justified to ensure this:

“The essential thing for all creatures is to be made to do right; how they are made to do it – by pleasant promises or hard necessities, pathetic oratory or the whip – is comparatively immaterial.”<sup>472</sup>

Nothing is more obnoxious to Ruskin than “the pursuit of that treacherous phantom which men call Liberty: most treacherous, indeed of all phantoms; for the feeblest ray of reason might surely show us, that not only its attainment, but its being, was impossible. There is no such thing in the universe. There never can be. The stars have it not; the earth has it not; the sea has it not; and we men have the mockery and semblance of it only for our heaviest punishment.” Let us abandon this word, “by which the luxurious mean licence, and the reckless mean change; by which the rogue means rapine, and the fool, equality, by which the proud mean anarchy, and the malignant violence”.<sup>473</sup>

The doctrines of liberty and equality “affect the whole body of the civilised world with apparently incurable disease”.<sup>474</sup> The whole of Ruskin’s work is peppered with tirades about “the impossibility of equality among men” and the respect due to “every man who is worthily filling his appointed place in society, however humble”.<sup>475</sup> Egalitarian speeches arouse his ire, or, more rarely, his contemptuous indulgence:

"... the common insolences and petulances of the people, and their talk of equality, are not irreverence in them in the least, but mere blindness, stupefaction, and fog in the brains, the first sign of any cleansing away of which is, that they gain some power of discerning, and some patience in submitting to, their true counsellors and governors".<sup>476</sup>

Inequality in the distribution of wealth is "always, in some degree, just and necessary",<sup>477</sup> and "justly established, benefits the nation".<sup>478</sup> He would prefer it always to be founded upon "paternal government", which he would want to reconcile with a semi-military disciplining of the masses, that the government might "have its soldiers of the ploughshare as well as its soldiers of the sword". It is only on condition that the workers "yield to the governor the direction and discipline of their labour" that he can paternally guarantee them full employment and protection in adversity.<sup>479</sup> In this manner also it will be possible to establish the same bonds of affection between the employer and worker as unite the military leader with his troops, the master with his servants.<sup>480</sup> His conclusion upon this point is clear and categorical:

"My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others; and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons to guide, to lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue, their inferiors according to their own better knowledge and wiser will." <sup>481</sup>

I will content myself with reminding those who claim to see in Morris nothing more than a complete disciple of Ruskin that in 1877, in his first public lecture, while no socialist influence was yet at work upon him and he was attempting to transmit faithfully the aesthetic message of the master, our poet exclaimed:

"I believe that as we have even now partly achieved liberty, so we shall one day achieve equality, which, and which only, means fraternity." <sup>482</sup>

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In 1856, in a letter to Henry Acland, Ruskin described himself as being "by nature and instinct, conservative, loving old things because they are old and hating new ones merely because they are new", and, sixteen years later, he repeated that he was "a violent Tory of the old school".<sup>483</sup> But at the same time he described himself as a "Communist of the old school – reddest also of the red".<sup>484</sup> These assertions did not seem to him to be at all contradictory and perhaps they are not altogether, provided, of course, one knows the meanings he is giving to the terms he uses.

We will leave aside the lamentable experiment of the Guild of St. George, which was for Ruskin little more than an occasion for uttering somewhat empty phrases and showing his incompetence and final loss of interest.<sup>485</sup> It is remarkable that Morris, despite the utopian nature of this adventure, never paid it the slightest attention. Instead, he pored avidly over Ruskin's social writing and, still proceeding in the selective way I have described, he attempted to establish a coherent link between his ethical and aesthetic message and what progressive elements there might be in his social message.



This is more specifically expressed in the later writings, possibly less familiar to Morris, but from the works which he already reread and admired he was able to glean a few encouraging assertions which he must have picked out indulgently from others which were doubtless less so.

One fundamental principle was stated in *Modern Painters*, that of mutual solidarity: "The highest and first law of the universe – and the other name of life is, therefore, 'help'. The other name of death is 'separation'. Government and co-operation are in all things and eternally the laws of life. Anarchy and competition, eternally, and in all things, the laws of death."<sup>486</sup> This more horizontal conception of the unity of the body of society was certainly more acceptable to Morris than the vertical and hierarchical concept of the human ladder. Moreover, it was mediaeval, as Ruskin did not fail to notice: "The Gothic had fellowship with all hearts, and was universal, like nature."<sup>487</sup>

It was in *Unto this Last* that Morris succeeded in finding ideas that suited him. One of them was certainly far more revolutionary than Ruskin imagined, with his total ignorance of the laws which governed the value of the labour force. The worker's just wage, he wrote "will consist in a sum of money which will at any time procure for him at least as much labour as he has given, rather more than less."<sup>488</sup> Poor Ruskin did not have any idea that he was demanding, pure and simply, the abolition of capitalist surplus value and of the private ownership of the means of production, and even added a thoroughly demagogic phrase, which Morris avoided supporting. What strikes me as more interesting, in regard to reward for labour, is an idea, which, by the way, contradicts this former one, which Ruskin develops in *The Political Economy of Art*, with the more or less avowed intention of shocking opinion by its paradox.

"... as for stimulus to exertion, believe me, no good work in this world was ever done for money... A real painter will work for you exquisitely, if you give him... bread, water and salt... And I believe that there is no chance of Art's flourishing in any country until you make it a simple and plain business, providing its masters with an easy competence, but rarely with anything more."<sup>489</sup>

This is an idea which Morris readily takes up, but in a very different context. What, with Ruskin, is more or less a paradox, becomes a coherent idea in Morris's communism: in the society of abundance, wages have disappeared, equality prevents any favoured treatment, every worker has become an artist and the reward for work is the work itself. It is, too, surprising that Ruskin did not link this proposition with the idea of pleasure in work. But let us get back to *Unto this Last*, where he sets out the fundamental principle of the choice to be made between charity and justice:

"... the mistake of the best men through generation after generation, has been that great one of thinking to help the poor by alms giving, and by every other means, emmolient or consolatory, except the one thing which God orders for them, justice."<sup>490</sup>

One must admit that Ruskin the Christian had gone a considerable way in order to reach this conclusion. But this abstract boldness soon turned sharply aside, because he declared that "we had better seek for a system which will develop honest men, than one which will deal cunningly with vagabonds", and

he deduced from that a proposition of classical idealism: "Let us reform our schools, and we shall find little reform needed in our prisons".<sup>491</sup> In truth, one cannot tell with Ruskin which is more important, deep feeling or rhetoric based upon a dazzling juggling with opposites. Is not that the impression left when one reads that "whereas it has long been known and declared that the poor have right to the property of the rich, I wish it also to be known and declared that the rich have no right to the property of the poor"?<sup>492</sup> And this impression is confirmed when Ruskin affirms the existence of "the great, palpable inevitable fact . . . that what one person has, another cannot have".<sup>493</sup>

The generous feelings which he displays lead on to practical conclusions such that one wonders what there can be "communist" about them:

"Note, finally, that all effectual advancement towards this true felicity of the human race must be by individual, not public effort. Certain general measures may aid, certain revised laws guide, such advancement; but the measure and law which have first to be determined are those of each man's home. We continually hear it recommended by sagacious people to complaining neighbours (usually less well placed in the world than themselves) that they should 'remain content in the station in which Providence has placed them'. There are perhaps some circumstances of life in which Providence has no intention that people *should* be content. Nevertheless, the maxim is on the whole a good one; but it is peculiarly for home use. That your neighbour should, or should not, remain content with *his* position, is not your business; but it is very much your business to remain content with your own."<sup>494</sup>

And in case his self-contradictions might have left the reader under some small illusion, he is at pains to disperse it:

"Observe, in these statements I am not taking up, nor countenancing one whit, the common socialist idea of division of property; division of property is its destruction; and with it the destruction of all hope, all industry, and all justice; it is simply chaos – a chaos towards which the believers in modern political economy are fast tending, and from which I am striving to save them . . . It is continually the fault or the folly of the poor that they are poor . . . Put it at the worst, that all the poor of the world are but disobedient children, or careless cripples, and that all rich people are wise and strong, and you will see at once that neither is the socialist right in desiring to make everybody poor, powerless, and foolish as he is himself, nor the rich man right in leaving the children in the mire."<sup>495</sup>

What is really appalling when one reads these lines is the realisation that, in the eyes of Ruskin, socialists are still "sharers" and apostles of equality at the lowest level. What is even more so, is to see that he is still possessed by the dominant ideology, as it had been codified by Samuel Smiles in his famous *Self-Help*, and that he declares the workers to be responsible for their own poverty. Podsnap might have used the same language, and one can easily see why Morris, despite the enthusiasm he had felt on reading Ruskin's pages on true riches should have abandoned the idea of publishing *Unto this Last* at Kelmscott Press.

However, one can only judge the message behind Ruskin's contradictions, and judge it also, in terms of his development. Morris must have felt some relief on reading *Fors Clavigera*, published between 1871 and 1877, that is, much later. He never makes the slightest reference to it in his articles, his correspondence or his lectures, but one finds various quotations in *Commonweal*, in the form of paragraphs, and possibly in that work we may find the solution to these strange contradictions.

The first striking fact, as soon as one skims through the first volume, is the relatively considerable understanding Ruskin had of the Paris Commune, whereas English opinion was up in arms against it:

"The guilty Thieves of Europe, the real sources of all deadly war in it, are the Capitalists – that is to say, people who live by percentages on the labour of others; instead of by fair wages for their own. The *Real* war in Europe, of which this fighting in Paris is the Inauguration, is between these and the workman, such as these have made him. They have kept him poor, ignorant, and sinful, that they might, without his knowledge, gather for themselves for produce of his toil. At last, a dim insight into the fact of this dawns on him; and such as they have made him he meets them, and *will* meet." <sup>496</sup>

An astonishing declaration, deserving of respect, even if it was followed by a withdrawal on the (false) report of the destruction of the artistic treasures of Paris by the Communards, and even if it does underestimate the level of political consciousness. In an article published in 1948 and republished in 1966 in his collection of essays, *The Matter of Britain*, A. L. Morton, undertaking a remarkable attempt at rehabilitation, underlines the importance of such a reaction, pointing out that for Ruskin's generation the attitude towards the Commune was the touchstone, just as, in the twentieth century, the touchstone must be with respect to the Russian revolution of 1917. <sup>497</sup>

But there is much more in *Fors*. For the first time, we find definite revolutionary proposals. While clearly dissociating himself from Karl Marx's International (and this is the first and only reference to it in the whole of his work), he observes that "the squire is essentially an idle person who has possession of land, and lends it, but does not use it; and the capitalist is essentially an idle person, who has possession of tools, and lends them, but does not use them; while the labourer, by definition, is a laborious person, and by presumption a penniless one, who is obliged to borrow both land and tools; and paying, for rent on the one, and profit on the other, what will maintain the squire and capitalist, digs finally a remnant of roots, wherewith to maintain himself." And he deduces from that that "land should belong to those who can use *it*, and tools to those who can use *them*; or, as a less revolutionary, and instantly practicable, proposal, that those who have land and tools should use them." <sup>498</sup>

In fact, the most revealing part of the book is that which he devotes to explaining why he is "a Communist of the old school – reddest also of the red". On closer examination, this explanation is a paraphrase of the last proposition "less revolutionary and instantly practicable". What is communism? he asks, and he replies:



First, it means that everybody must work in common and do common or simple work for his dinner; and that if any man will not do it, he must not have his dinner."

This communism "of the old school" is the obligation upon all to work, and he bases it upon extensive quotations from Thomas More which tend in this direction, but he deliberately isolates them from the rest of *Utopia*, probably judging it to be too revolutionary. The second aspect of this communism, equally established by recourse to More, is Christian humility justifying authority:

"our chief concern is to find out any among us wiser and of better make than the rest, and to get them, if they will for any persuasion take the trouble, to rule over us, and teach us how to behave, and make the most of what little good is in us."

His third borrowing from More's communism deserves to be quoted more fully, because it deals with an idea which was to be very dear to Morris and is, at the same time, a very revealing betrayal of the thought of the sixteenth-century utopist:

". . . the public, or common, wealth, shall be more and statelier in all its substance than private or singular wealth; that is to say . . . that there shall be only cheap and few pictures, if any, in the insides of houses, where nobody but the owner can see them; but costly pictures, and many, on the outsides of houses, where the people can see them: also that the Hotel-de-Ville, or Hotel of the whole Town, for the transaction of its common business, shall be a magnificent building, much rejoiced in by the people, and with its tower seen far away through the clear air . . . The buildings for public or common service, more especially schools, almshouses, and workhouses, are to be externally of a majestic character, as being for noble purposes and charities; and in their interiors furnished with many luxuries for the poor and sick. And, finally and chiefly, it is an absolute law of old Communism that the fortunes of private persons should be small, and of little account in the State; but the common treasure of the whole nation should be of superb and precious things . . . there should be a common wealth . . . consisting of pleasant things, which every poor person in the nation should be summoned to receive his dole of, annually."

If this idea of public splendour is common to More and to Morris, and if Ruskin takes it from More as one of the foundation-stones of his "communism of the old school", he is making a fundamental revelation of his thinking and is left far behind, because in More's *Utopia* there were no rich or poor; money had disappeared, along with all property, even private property. Finally, at the end of his lyrical outburst, Ruskin proposes to hold beauty, science and virtue in common.<sup>499</sup>

So what Ruskin retains of More's communism is its least democratic aspect: the discipline of work, the principle of authority and moral preaching. He is not so wrong, all in all, to announce himself as Communist and Tory at the same time, but he is visibly much more Tory than "reddest of the red" and one

cannot even talk of his communism without setting aside all his other declarations in the opposite direction. Is it not typical that, during the very years when he was writing *Fors Clavigera*, he wrote in a letter, on 10 October 1877:

"Let me earnestly beg you not to confuse the discussion of the principles of Property in Earth, Air or Water, with the discussion of principles of Property in general . . . Any attempts to communize these have always ended, and will always end in ruin and shame." <sup>500</sup>

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At the end of this analysis, one question inevitably arises. Did William Morris deliberately shut his eyes? Was his selective fervour blind or did it abstain from any criticism? Fortunately, it was nothing of the kind and while he continued to the end to praise what he considered precious in Ruskin's message, on many occasions he dissociated himself. As early as 1882, before any other influence came to interfere, he admitted that "one does not always agree with him". <sup>501</sup> We may even recall that, in 1860, the spiritual ramblings of *Modern Painters* made him lose his patience and he declared that the fifth volume, newly out, was "mostly gammon". <sup>502</sup> Contrariwise, one may remark also that Ruskin, lost in his clouds, was sometimes completely mistaken over the meaning of Morris's socialism. Following the famous lecture of 1883, *Art under Plutocracy*, which was our poet's first profession of political faith and which caused such an uproar when he delivered it in Oxford under the chairmanship of the master, the latter, talking to his students a few days later, made a quick reference to it. Recalling, from Morris's speech, the part that had dealt with the architectural decadence of Oxford, he praised him for having replaced the word democracy by plutocracy in the title of his lecture, and concluded:

"The changes which he so deeply deplored, and so grandly resented, in this once loveliest city, are due wholly to the deadly fact that her power is now dependent on the Plutocracy of Knowledge, instead of its Divinity." <sup>503</sup>

But one could not have been mistaken about the meaning Morris gave to the word plutocracy, and the dignitaries who occupied the rostrum had not misunderstood when they had got up and walked out. As for Oxford theology, our poet was no more concerned with that than he was with any other kind of religion, and this marked the first dividing line between the two men. Ruskin's unending contradictions were bound to upset Morris in the end, despite all his tolerance. Speaking to Shaw of this master he held in such veneration, he said, "he would write the most profound truths and forget them five minutes later". <sup>504</sup> The dogmatism of his preaching jarred upon him just as much, and he deplored the "damage Ruskin may have done to his influence by his strange bursts of fantastic perversity". <sup>505</sup>

He could not help seeing the ridiculous and vain aspect of his tirades and an account Bruce Glasier gives us in this connection is both odd and significant. Ruskin had been a candidate for the office of Lord Rector of Glasgow University and had been resoundingly rejected in favour of a reactionary opponent.

"But I don't suppose," said Morris, "he was defeated because he called himself a red-hot Communist, or even because he held heterodox views about Capital and Labour . . . He was defeated, I suspect, because he represented to the generality of the intellectuals what they particularly affect to esteem – namely Literature and Art – but which they really don't. Literature and Art are rebellious jades." <sup>506</sup>

In other words, Morris considered that Ruskin's aesthetic and humanist thought was rightly regarded as more revolutionary and dangerous to the established order than the hodge-podge of socialism which he so noisily professed.

On several occasions he made considered judgments of Ruskin's socialism, briefly, it is true, but in a very revealing way. Disregarding the unending contradictions I have mentioned, and wanting only to retain the affirmation of socialism, he wrote in 1889:

"The pessimistic revolt of the latter end of this century led by John Ruskin against the philistinism of the triumphant bourgeois, halting and stumbling as it necessarily was, shows that the change in the life of civilization had begun, before any one seriously believed in the possibility of altering its machinery." <sup>507</sup>

So he sees no constructive character in this "pessimistic revolt" and even stresses its lack of substance. On the other hand, he regards it as a ferment of dissatisfaction, a beginning of understanding, from which real socialism might develop. He explained all this clearly in a lecture delivered in the same year, *How Shall We Live Then?* Up until now, we only knew the gist of this lecture through very incomplete press reports: the manuscript was thought to be lost, but I found it in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam:

"I know that I had come to these conclusions a good deal through reading John Ruskin's works, and that I focussed so to say his views on the matter of my work and my rising sense of injustice, probably more than he intended, and that the result of all that was that I was quite ready for Socialism when I came across it in a definite form, as a political party with distinct aims for a revolution in society." <sup>508</sup>

We note that Morris was well aware of having gone beyond Ruskin's intentions. In a piece written in dialogue form in *Commonweal* in 1887, the rather mediocre quality of which explains why it has never attracted any notice, Morris gives us to understand that Ruskin's socialism is little more than just talk.

"How," asks one of the characters, "should you have known I was a Socialist? If ever I began to talk about the wrongs of the working class, or the stupidity of our system of production, you would take me all cross, and think I was only talking Ruskinism." <sup>509</sup>

Never had Morris taken disrespect so far, nor so plainly asserted that one cannot claim to be a socialist on the strength of simple denunciation. One cannot help putting this estimate beside a confidence which Ruskin had made to Sydney Cockerell the previous year, and which the latter probably carried back to the poet: "Morris is perfectly right in all he says – only he should not



say it. But do all he can in his own art.”<sup>510</sup> There, again, shows a fundamental difference of attitude.

However, we must admit that it was only exceptionally that Morris's tone was severe to this extent. He was conscious of all he owed Ruskin in the realm of humanist thought (which is where he found the revolutionary element of his message). In his preface to *The Nature of Gothic*, Morris took into account certain bold statements which appeared in later works (and which he strove to detach from their context) and so persisted in seeing in him a pioneer of the great journey into the future, “in spite of all the disappointments of forty years, and although some of us, John Ruskin among others, have since learned what the equipment for the journey must be.”<sup>511</sup>

In 1884, filled with the conquering ardour of the neophyte, he went so far as to ask him to join the Democratic Federation. Pleading his state of health, Ruskin refused.<sup>512</sup> He would certainly have done so even without that pretext. He was solitary by temperament, even on the intellectual plane, and his social thinking had matured apart from any reading: the works of contemporary socialists were entirely unknown to him. Was his attitude so very different on the artistic plane? Did he not write:

“Society always has a destructive influence upon the artist: first, by its sympathy with his meanest powers; secondly, by its chilling want of understanding of his greatest; and, thirdly, by its vain occupation of his time and thoughts. Of course a painter of men must be among men: but it ought to be as a watcher, not as a companion.”<sup>513</sup>

We are a long way from the fraternal warmth of Morris, from that sense of fellowship which inspired his art as well as his socialism. Living among men, joining in with the work, both in his own artistic activity and as a militant, Morris felt the need to have a solid theoretical foundation and an active knowledge of political necessity. He could find neither in Ruskin and frankly said so:

“... though I have a great respect for Ruskin, and his works (besides personal friendship) he is not a socialist, that is not a *practical* one. He does not expect to see any general scheme even begun: he mingles with certain sound ideas which he seems to have acquired instinctively, a great deal of mere whims, deduced probably from that early training of which he gives an amusing account.”<sup>514</sup>

When, at the end of his life, he rendered final homage to Ruskin's influence, in the famous retrospective article in *Justice*, he made use of a phrase which appears not to have been sufficiently noticed. He was my master, he writes, “before my days of practical Socialism.”<sup>515</sup> It is clear that these few simple and precise words give the exact dimensions of the problem.

One even begins to wonder if, on balance, the differences do not outweigh the points of agreement, when one draws up a list of all that Morris completely rejected: an idealist and theological conception of the world, a mediaevalism which, although it went back to the best traditions of art, led on to feudal nostalgia and put a return to the past in the place of a prospect for the future, a social ideology based upon the principle that we must be good to be happy, not that one must be happy to be good,<sup>516</sup> a philosophy of history which rejected

any law of development other than that of moral conscience and refused to see any connection between capitalist exploitation and the decadence of art, support of class collaboration, a horror of any ideas about liberty and equality, a vehement authoritarianism which refused the working class any improvement in its lot other than that charitably granted by its masters by divine right.

That is all true, and all that Morris in fact rejected. But there remains all the positive content of Ruskin's humanism, particularly his conception of work and the worker. That, much more than his socialist whims, forms a coherent whole which is to be found again whole in Morris's utopianism. This raises a question which some will find intriguing. Would it not be tempting to say that one must distinguish between two completely separate elements in his utopia: economic and social thought, the paternity of which can be ascribed to Marx, and a humanism which comes solely from Ruskin's message? I have no hesitation in saying that such a question derives from a misconception. It betrays an ignorance, encouraged by recent as well as by earlier theories, of the fact that Marxism is humanism, totally different from traditional abstract humanism, but real and fertile; and, as we shall clearly see by the end of our study, it is this materialist humanism, and not speculative humanism, which is at the base of Morris's utopia. But, one may say, what about Ruskin's theme of work and the worker? I reply that the same theme is to be found in Marx and Engels, whose attitudes to problems often match those of Ruskin, except that with them there is no question of any idealist complications; and this position of principle is that of Morris. If, for sentimental and aesthetic reasons, Morris's formulations are more often inspired by Ruskin's, the philosophical inspiration which animates them is certainly different.

### CHAPTER THREE

## *Pre-Marxist Socialism and its Extensions*

The present chapter constitutes a parenthesis in our study, but one difficult to avoid if we wish to include without discrimination all the influences which, in varying degrees, bore upon William Morris's utopian thinking. It is, of course, a question of secondary influences, not in the least comparable in scope or determining rôle with those of Ruskin or Karl Marx. But some aspect or some detail of Morris's anticipation strongly implies their existence. It may seem astonishing that Morris, whose rigorous adherence to Marxist theory I shall establish, should have drawn unhesitatingly upon the ideology of that utopian socialism so frequently condemned or ridiculed by Marx and Engels. But such astonishment would be simple-minded or tendentious. For one thing, these condemnations and ridicule are very far from black-and-white. They are aimed in essence at the lack of a realistic conception of the class struggle and the fundamental inability to comprehend the historical laws whose application makes it possible to discover the ways and means to revolutionary change. Contrariwise, they show real admiration for certain inspired intuitions (Marx and Engels have no hesitation over using such terms in connection with Saint-Simon, Owen or, especially, Fourier) in the critique of the capitalist system and the expectation of a classless society.<sup>1</sup> Morris knew these writings of Marx and Engels perfectly well, and took note of both condemnation and praise. Any borrowings he may have made do not run counter to either. On the other hand, neither Marx nor Engels ventured into the realm of utopian dreams apart from a general historical view. So Morris felt that he legitimately had an open field and was entitled to bring into his predictions any borrowing which fitted the conception he desired to achieve.

Concerning French socialism, which is our first interest, I am greatly embarrassed. With just one exception, that of Victor Considérant, I cannot find, either in the writings of Morris *alone* or in the evidence of his contemporaries, any reference to definite reading. Sotheby's catalogue of the sale of his library in 1898 mentions lots consisting of socialist books and pamphlets, but with no details of titles. At first sight, another source is more interesting. In a paragraph entitled "Books for Socialists", *Commonweal* in 1886 published a list of recommended reading for League members,<sup>2</sup> and this list contains titles of books (in English and in French) by Fourier, Proudhon and Saint-Simon. However, there is no proof that Morris compiled the list, and I am, in fact, strongly inclined to doubt it, for two reasons. On the one hand, it contains errors of fact: it is difficult to believe that Morris would credit Fourier with V. Considérant's *La Destinée sociale* (the only book in this class which I am sure he did read). On the other hand, the titles given in French bristle with linguistic



errors, which would be surprising on the part of our poet. One last indication claims our attention: an anecdote related by Bruce Glasier. In 1888, during a propaganda tour in Glasgow, Morris, in a long chat with members of the local branch, was astonished that none of them had read Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier or Louis Blanc.<sup>3</sup> There was no mention made at the time of specific titles, and one must also take into account the fact that Bruce Glasier's memories dated back thirty-three years, which leaves room for doubt as to their accuracy: he might either have added or omitted.

There remains the theoretical handbook: *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, published in 1893. This work contains two chapters, XVII and XVIII, entitled respectively: *The Utopists: Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier*, and: *The Transition from the Utopists to Modern Socialism*. In these two chapters, there is mention, beside the three authors named in the title of the first, of V. Considérant, Cabet, Proudhon, Lammenais, Pierre Leroux and Louis Blanc, and a certain number of their works are mentioned. Does this provide us with a sure key? I do not think so, again for two reasons. In the first place, the book is the joint work of Morris and Bax. Now, the latter certainly had a better knowledge than Morris of the history of socialism and it is by no means certain that our poet had read all the books mentioned. It is very likely that he took second place to Bax in drawing up the list. Secondly, the two chapters are, explicitly, a paraphrase and exegesis, complete with quotations, of Engels's *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* and Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*. The authors faithfully reproduce the analyses and judgments expressed there, and their rare more personal comments are, for the reason already indicated, of ill-defined paternity. On the other hand, in the last chapter of the book, entitled *Socialism Triumphant*, Fourier is again mentioned, and this passage, dealing with the problem of joy in labour, unmistakably bears the mark of Morris: it is too much in line with his essential interests for there to be room for the smallest doubt. In my opinion, this is the only certainty within our grasp. As for other utopian socialists, it will simply be a question of ideological or textual similarities that may guide our enquiry. Even in such cases I shall avoid unsupported assertions. Sometimes, in fact, it might be a question of simple coincidence and we must always bear in mind the fact that all utopias draw upon a common pool. In other cases, there may have been reading and assimilation, but second-degree assimilation, if I may so put it; that is, in plainer terms, secondary confirmation of a major influence. Finally, and I am tempted to think that this is most often the case, there was perhaps a rapid reading, the traces of which show as scraps difficult to identify. There may also not have been any reading at all without all possibility of influence being thereby excluded. The works of these utopian socialists could have cropped up in many a conversation and discussion between Morris and his comrades in the struggle. Their ideas were "in the air", and Morris was an attentive listener.

### 1. Babouvism

Before turning to Saint-Simon and Fourier there seems to me to be some point in looking at another question, that of an influence of Babeuf, or more exactly of Babouvism, because the published writings of the conspiratorial tribune were difficult to come by at that time. On the other hand, the *Conspiration pour*

*l'égalité dite de Babeuf*, which Buonarroti published in Brussels in 1828, had been translated into English in 1836 by Bronterre O'Brien, and this book had made a considerable impression during the Chartist period. It is altogether possible, even probable, that Morris read it. In any case, he had an immense admiration for Babeuf, and, some time before his death, he made Bax promise to write a book on the Conspiracy of Equals; and it was in order to keep this promise that Bax published, in 1911, *The Last Episode of the French Revolution*.<sup>4</sup>

However, references to Babeuf are very rare in Morris's work. There is clearly reference to him in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, where his attempt at insurrection is briefly recalled and his message described as "the first socialist propaganda".<sup>5</sup> Much more curious is a reference made in a lecture in 1885. There Babeuf is called

"pioneer or prophet . . . analogous in some respects to the Levellers of Cromwell's time, but, as might be expected, far more advanced and reasonable than they were."

He had the merit, adds Morris, of trying to put into practice the watchwords of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality which the Republic always emblazoned upon its banners, interpreting them in "a middle-class or . . . Jesuitical sense".<sup>6</sup> This comparison with the Levellers is interesting for two reasons. First, because the same comparison already existed in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*,<sup>7</sup> which, without being proof, justifies a presumption that Morris had, at that time, read Engels's pamphlet. And above all, the nature and the sense of the comparison deserve attention. What Morris primarily retained from Babouvism was its egalitarian ideology, which was like a religion to the insurrectionary movement.

"The French republic," wrote Buonarrotti, "not accepting any revelation, would not adopt any particular creed; but it would have made equality the only dogma acceptable to the divinity."<sup>8</sup>

Of all the writers of utopias, Morris is certainly the one who lays greatest stress upon this principle, and I believe that we can legitimately suppose that this uncompromising attitude, which straightway deliberately broke with the preaching of Carlyle, Ruskin and even Fourier, had its origin in Babouvism. How many times Morris described communism as "the society of equality"! Clearly he could not subscribe to the notion of an authoritarian equality in penury, inevitably linked to the level of the productive forces before the industrial era, and, in response to Marx's teaching, he could only conceive of communism amid abundance. It is none the less true that egalitarianism rings insistently through his utopia.

There are other ideas in the "programme of the insurrectionary committee" which, even if they had no direct influence upon Morris's thinking, may, at the very least, have confirmed or clarified ideas acquired elsewhere, such as the replacement of the right to property by "an equal right to happiness", subject to "the obligation imposed upon every member to undertake a share in the necessary work".<sup>9</sup> As in More's utopia, "the citizen shall never acquire over anything what is known as property rights; he shall only have the right of use or benefit of the objects placed in his possession".<sup>10</sup> Morris, without being so

draconian, describes a situation which tends towards this state of affairs. Other ideas of More's are to be found in the conspirators' programme: the free distribution of "all the products of earth and industry . . . deposited in public shops";<sup>11</sup> the reduction of the working day to "three or four hours", thanks to the disappearance of "frivolous products . . . which have no worth but in the eyes of vanity and idleness";<sup>12</sup> and finally, a conception of town life corresponding to his own:

"When there were no longer any palaces, there would no longer be any hovels; houses would be simple, and the magnificence of architecture and the arts which enhance their beauty would be reserved to public buildings, to amphitheatres, circuses, aquaducts, bridges, canals, squares, archives, libraries and especially to places devoted to the deliberations of magistrates and the exercise of popular sovereignty".<sup>13</sup>

From analogies with the ideas of More, we pass to those with the prohibition of Cobbett:

"No more capital, no more big cities; gradually the country would become covered with villages, built in the healthiest and most suitable places, and so disposed as to facilitate communication . . ."

In the name of republican virtue, the conspirators forbade large built-up areas, as being centres of vice and inequality, which take from the land, the only source of all wealth, the arms which it needs.<sup>14</sup>

Although I have only so far mentioned complementary or hypothetical influences, nevertheless there are some aspects of the Babouvist utopia which may have claimed Morris's attention more directly. First, with the purpose of avoiding "for certain classes too heavy a burden of labour", the conspirators thought "that it would be necessary to call upon the sciences to lighten the toil of men, by the invention of new machines and the perfecting of old ones", which is due to happen during Morris's first stage of socialism. But the machine would not be capable of resolving all difficulties, even at the advanced stage described by Morris, and there is the risk of the continuation of unpleasant and repulsive tasks. For this reason the composers of the "insurrectionary" programme already considered

"that it would be a good thing to charge able-bodied citizens, turn by turn, with the more unpleasant occupations, the objectionableness of which would, one trusted, be progressively diminished by a virile education and the resources of mechanics and chemistry".<sup>15</sup>

This is a solution which occurred to Morris, who also thought that, in a society which had reached the stage of communism, voluntary labour would not be lacking.

Further, he could not but have been sympathetic to the way in which the conspirators proposed to organise the conduct of public affairs. They would, purely and simply, suppress "any class exclusively skilled in the principles of social science, laws and administration", because "it would soon find, in the superiority of its wit, and, especially, in the ignorance of its compatriots, the secret of creating distinctions and privileges for itself". Equality demands, therefore, that the exercise of legislative power be entrusted to all citizens, and



this new idea would not raise any difficulty because "the multiplicity and clash of interests would be wiped out, and the art of conducting public affairs, having become much simplified, would soon be within the grasp of all". Each citizen would, therefore, be "summoned to assemblies where the people would exercise its sovereignty", and these popular assemblies would meet "to discuss, agree or reject laws proposed to the people by its representatives; to consider laws suggested by a certain number of citizens or by other sections of the sovereign body; to be cognisant of and to publish laws approved by the whole people". Here one is certainly talking of a centralised, parliamentary State, and not of the autonomous and apolitical communes described by Morris in his world that has achieved the stage of communism, but there is, nevertheless, an embryo of the direct democracy foreseen by him. The possibility of such a democracy, in a society from which private property has disappeared, is displayed clearly in the programme presented by Buonarotti, and in terms very similar to those used by Morris:

"When one considers, moreover, that the dissension caused today in these meetings by the clash of interests which frequently reduces them to mobs would be banished from them; when one reflects, furthermore, that, having reached a great simplicity in the ordering of public business, all would easily appreciate the usefulness of these assemblies, one will be convinced that, true equality once having been established, they necessarily become objects of interest, of relaxation and of useful emulation".<sup>16</sup>

Buonarotti stresses the immense simplification which would result from the new régime and the ease with which democracy would, consequently, be exercised. Here again, the similarity with ideas expressed by Morris is too striking for me to refrain from quoting:

"In order to appreciate the advantages which would derive from legislative power so ordered, one must remember, above all, that a people without property and without the vices and crimes which it engenders, without commerce, money, taxes, finance, civil lawsuits and without want, would not have need of a great number of the laws under which the civilised societies of Europe groan".<sup>17</sup>

Finally, we find in the *Conspiration pour l'égalité*, a somewhat surprising idea which might well have directed Morris's attention towards one of the fundamental problems of the first stage of the new society, the problem of "unequal rights" which Marx later analysed in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and which Morris raised in 1885 in the Manifesto of the Socialist League.

"All having equally contributed," wrote Buonarotti, "to fertilising the ground and preparing its crops, it is patently just that all should equally participate in the enjoyment of the results, upon which nature has made the preservation and happiness of the species depend"; (but, he adds) "equality is to be measured less by the intensity of fatigue than by the capacity of the worker."<sup>18</sup>

This laconic formula risks not being sufficiently clear, and Buonarotti develops his thought in a note following his statement. He is supposed to be

replying to the following objection, which expresses remarkably the point of the problem: "The physical differences which exist between men do not allow of the establishment, in the allocation of work and consumer goods, of that perfect equality which is the objective of the community." Here is the writer's reply to that objection:

"Here equality must be measured by the capacity of the worker and by the needs of the consumer, and not by the intensity of work or amount of goods consumed. He who, endowed with a certain measure of strength, raises a weight of ten pounds, is working just as hard as he who, possessed of five-fold strength, moves one of fifty. That man who, to slake a burning thirst, drinks a bottle of water, enjoys no more than his neighbour who, slightly thirsty, empties a mug. The objective of the community in question is the equality of enjoyment and effort, and not in the least that of things consumed or the task of the worker."<sup>19</sup>

This extraordinary text contains the germ of the famous Marxist definition of communism: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs"; but, despite the pertinence of the objection which poses a real problem in precise terms, Buonarrotti gives an answer which can only be theoretical and abstract. The real answer to the real problem could only be given by the theory of two stages, as formulated later by Karl Marx and William Morris. But the fact of having posed it is a praiseworthy act of clear-sightedness at a time when the conditions for a precise solution did not yet exist. We do not know the date of Morris's reading of the *Conspiration pour l'égalité*, and it is only the similarity of certain characteristics which lead me to believe that he did read it. In any case, it is, at the very least, an altogether probable hypothesis which we have no right to set aside. It is a pity, as regards the last aspect considered, that our ignorance of the date of reading does not allow us to understand better the development of Morris's thought on so important a problem.

## 2. Saint-Simon

I do not think there is much to be gained by dwelling at length on Saint-Simon. Nothing leads me to suppose that Morris had any *direct* contact with his work, which does not in any way imply that the knowledge of it he may have had through the writings of Engels was negligible. Aside from the theoretical handbook of 1893, to which I have referred and to which I shall return, the only mention I find of Saint-Simon from the pen of Morris goes back to that same lecture in 1885 in which there was reference to Babeuf in terms which already suggest the reading of Engels. He cites the name of Saint-Simon, haphazard with those of Owen, Proudhon and Fourier, to indicate socialists who "have kept up the tradition of hope in the midst of a bourgeois world",<sup>20</sup> and he only went on with the case of Fourier, who, he said, deserved special attention.

The only book title to which we can refer is that which figures in the list (of doubtful paternity) published by *Commonweal* in 1886, *On the Reorganization of European Society*. Examination of it does not take us far. Certainly, Saint-Simon anticipated Marx in general terms when he asserted the primacy of the economic infrastructure and wrote, for example:

"There is no change in the social order without a change of property . . . But the resistance of property-owners cannot be overcome unless the non-owners take arms, hence civil war . . ."

But these are ideas which Morris would find in much more precise and convincing form in Marxist literature. The invitation to utopia is more attractive:

"The imagination of poets has placed the golden age in the cradle of mankind, amid the ignorance and uncouthness of the first years . . . Mankind's golden age is not by any means behind us, it lies ahead, in the perfection of social order; our forefathers never saw it, but our offspring will one day reach it; we have to hew out the way for them." <sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, this fine optimism still leaves "the means blank". One may also wonder whether Morris appreciated a progressive ideology based upon such contempt for past centuries. If he had had a more detailed knowledge of the work of Saint-Simon, he would probably have reacted with some vigour against the proposed model industrial pyramid with its whiff of technocracy: it is enough to recall the poor opinion he had of Carlyle's aristocracy of talent. <sup>22</sup> He would have been just as much put off by the contradictions and incoherence which run through the book, and which are lucidly brought out by Gurvitch's introduction. The call to arms of non-owners against property-owners seems to be an extraordinary outburst, and the constant concern with "improving the lot of the poorest and most numerous class" is of reformist rather than revolutionary inspiration. Nor can one very well see how the proletarians would become "shareholders" in a world where the "industrial class", having achieved power, saw the establishment of a hegemony of industrial magnates.

Another point of difference appears in the remarks upon Saint-Simon contained in the book by Morris and Bax – and it is an oddity which claims our attention. The authors quote and translate *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* from the shortened edition published by Paul Lafargue in 1880. But they precede the quotation by remarks upon Saint-Simon's mysticism and new religion, taking up and developing a phrase occurring before this passage in *Anti-Dühring*, from which the pamphlet is taken, and which Bax, an excellent German scholar, obviously knew. Carrying Engels's thought further, Morris and Bax demonstrate the fact that this mysticism finally led into the religion of Comte. This was possibly not Morris's first contact with such a development, because he strongly reproached the English positivists for their claim to wish to make capitalism "moral".

Despite these profound differences between Morris and Saint-Simon, whom our poet probably only knew partially and indirectly, we must pay the closest attention to the judgment made by Engels, which is reproduced in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*:

"In 1816 he asserted that politics were but the science of production, and predicted their absorption by economy. The knowledge that economic conditions serve as the base of political institutions only shows itself here in the germ; nevertheless, this proposition contains clearly the conversion of the political government of men into an administration of



things and a direction of the process of production; that is to say, the abolition of the State, of which such a noise has since been made.”<sup>24</sup>

After thus paying homage to Saint-Simon, Engels, in the second part of his pamphlet, takes up himself, looking forward to communist society, the idea that the State will wither away and that then “the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things”.<sup>25</sup> This fundamental idea is adopted intact by Morris in his utopian thinking and finds dazzling expression in *News from Nowhere*. So if the influence of Saint-Simon was only felt indirectly, through Engels, it was, nonetheless, of capital importance.

### 3. Charles Fourier and Victor Considérant

Morris's knowledge of the work of Fourier, although it is beyond doubt, poses just as many problems. Textual analysis<sup>26</sup> leads me to believe that it took effect in four stages. In an article published in *Justice* in 1894, Morris wrote:

“Oddly enough, I *had* read some of Mill, to wit, those posthumous papers of his (published, was it in the *Westminster Review* or the *Fortnightly*?) in which he attacks Socialism in its Fourierist guise. In those papers he put the arguments, as far as they go, clearly and honestly, and the result, so far as I was concerned, was to convince me that Socialism was a necessary change, and that it was possible to bring it about in our own days. Those papers put the finishing touch to my conversion to Socialism . . . I learned from Mill against *his* intention that Socialism was necessary.”<sup>27</sup>

Morris seems to have been very pleased with this anecdote and to have related it to many friends.<sup>28</sup> Shaw repeats it in his turn,<sup>29</sup> but in such a way as to lead the whole tribe of biographers and critics into error, for they followed him in believing that the text to which Morris referred was to be found in *The Principles of Political Economy*. In his unjustly neglected and forgotten work, Gustav Fritzsche, basing himself upon Morris's statements, identified Mill's articles, published in February and April of 1879 in the *Fortnightly Review*,<sup>30</sup> under the title of *Chapters on Socialism*.

The memory of this reading which Morris offers us after a lapse of fifteen years is, moreover, slightly inaccurate in three respects. Mill's articles are not, strictly speaking, anti-socialist, and they constitute an account which Morris himself recognised to be clear and honest. Mill simply wonders whether the systems which he describes are workable.<sup>31</sup> One really has the right to wonder whether, instead of the negative character which our poet attributes to him, Mill's influence was not directly positive. Secondly, supposing that Mill did “attack socialism” he did not do so exclusively “in its Fourierist guise”. In fact, he quoted about two pages of Owen, three pages of Louis Blanc and six pages of Fourier, which undoubtedly laid the main stress on the latter and claimed Morris's main attention. Thirdly, it is not quotations from Fourier which we find, but, more exactly, from Victor Considérant who, in *Destinée sociale*, had collected and given shape to thoughts scattered by Fournier through many volumes. It is to the point to stress that the presentation was very faithful, and, despite the inclusion of certain rather bold fantasies of the

master's on the passions and sexual promiscuity, more or less complete.

So, it is justifiable to believe that the second stage of Morris's initiation into Fourier was the reading of *Destinée sociale*. We are sure about this reading, not only because the title figures in the catalogue of the Sotheby's sale in 1898, but also because an incidental reference by May Morris gives us to understand that the book was a household word.<sup>32</sup> In any case, it was not in Mill's articles, which are silent upon the point, that Morris could have found the account of the attractiveness of work, which was in his eyes an essential element of Fourier's theories.

The third stage would be the reading of Fourier himself. But although it seems probable, it is not established by any text or any evidence. The famous list of recommended readings for socialists in *Commonweal* is the more suspect in that the titles quoted of works by Fourier are complete fantasy: *Theory of Social Organization*, *Réalisation d'un (sic) commune sociétaire!* However, if we are, concerning this third stage, reduced to pure conjecture, it is of no consequence. Even if Morris never read any book of Fourier's, *Destinée sociale* gives so accurate an idea of his work that the reading of that justifies Morris in claiming an acquaintance with it. Note, though, that in all his writings he always refers to the thinking of Fourier and never to its interpretation by Considérant which constitutes something of a presumption.

Up to 1893, the date of the publication of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, Morris speaks of Fourier only to praise his theory of the attractiveness of work. It is only in this manual of socialism (and this brings us to the fourth stage) that we find a reasonably complete exposition of the whole doctrine. There again, but less so than in the case of Saint-Simon, Bax's collaboration seems decisive, and reference to quotations from Engels shapes the final judgment. Certainly Morris unreservedly supports this judgment taken from *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, which stresses the outstanding rôle played by Fourier in the critique of bourgeois society and the elaboration of an evolutive concept of history. But Engels passes over Fourier's ideas about work in silence, and, since it is dealt with at length in the handbook it can only be as a direct personal reaction on the part of Morris. Bearing in mind the late date of the handbook, when Morris's utopian thinking was more or less completed, it is clear that the overall estimate we make at this stage is of secondary importance and that our attention should be focused upon this particular interest.

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It would indicate shortsightedness and subservience to a rigid system on my part if I were to rely exclusively upon Morris's declarations and the single avowed acknowledgement of his debt; it is, in fact, greater than he says. First, it is semantic. The pejorative use which Morris makes of the word *civilization* to describe the society of the capitalist age, in contrast to earlier societies on the one hand, and to socialism on the other, is a direct borrowing from Fourier.<sup>33</sup>

"The word civilisation," writes Considérant, "will be used here to characterise the social period which humanity entered upon leaving Barbarism; it is the state in which we and the greater part of Europe now exist. — Civilisation represents progress by comparison with Savagery and Barbarism, but it is still an incoherent society filled with evil and wretchedness."<sup>34</sup>

After this historical definition, here is a descriptive definition:

"Cheating, oppression, theft, slaughter by sabre and cannon, death by the guillotine, killing by poverty and a thousand other scourges more are the necessary evils of civilisation, offspring it engenders daily with odious fecundity."<sup>35</sup>

We have been, declares Fourier,

"in the third phase of civilisation for a century, but, during this short space of time, this phase has developed very rapidly on account of the colossal progress of industry".<sup>36</sup>

The "civilised mechanism", he adds, "is a war of each individual against the mass, a régime in which everyone is concerned with duping the public".<sup>37</sup> Just as Saint-Simon talks of an "upsidedown world", he talks of a "wrong-way-round world".<sup>38</sup> Writing at a time when the industrial surge was hardly starting, he describes especially the mess made of agricultural production, and, using an expression which Morris repeats almost word for word in *News from Nowhere*, he refers to "the sad and dirty peasants of civilisation".<sup>39</sup> So it will be necessary

"to rise higher in the social scale, not to wallow forever in this abyss of poverty and nonsense called civilisation, which, with its individual achievements and its floods of false illumination, cannot guarantee the people work and bread."<sup>40</sup>

The source of this poverty (and the still inadequate development of the productive forces excuses this lack of insight) is found, for Fourier, not in the exploitation of labour, but in commerce, which represents in his eyes the fundamental blemish of civilisation. Himself condemned to a mediocre commercial career which revolted him, he becomes strident whenever he touches upon the subject and, while it is true that Morris's analysis is based upon more scientific criteria, it cannot be disputed that Fourier's vehemence seems to possess him whenever he himself refers to "commercialism"; we note, too, that with him this term is frequently synonymous with capitalism, introducing an annoying ambiguity of obvious origin.

"These legions of merchants," writes Fourier, "are, relative to true order, social buccaneers, industrial hornets, who, producing nothing, appropriate through their expenses the greater part of the profit and by their extortions ruin producer, consumer and government, under the guise of supplying them."<sup>41</sup>

It is time for commerce "to disappear from human society, to which it brings only depravity and ruin".<sup>42</sup> In the social commune, *Considérant* prophesies (and it is an idea which became dear to Morris), "the producer is in direct contact with the consumer".<sup>43</sup>

The consequence of this lust for gain is the adulteration of all natural products. There is no question that Morris's denunciation of all the "makeshifts" of civilisation is a direct echo of Fourier's invective:

"It is claimed that men are no more false than formerly; but half a cen-



tury ago we could buy cheaply well-dyed materials and natural foods; today falsification and roguery abound everywhere. The farmer has become as big a cheat as the merchant used to be. Milk, oils, wines, brandy, sugar, coffee, flour, all are adulterated with impunity. The mass of poor people cannot obtain natural foodstuffs; they are sold nothing but slow poisons, so greatly has commerce progressed even in the smallest villages.”<sup>44</sup>

“Indirect depravity of science: among other ways, by the progress of chemistry, which works only for the vexation of the poor by providing commerce with the means to make all foods unnatural: potato bread, logwood wine, imitation vinegar, false oil, false coffee, mock sugar, mock indigo; there is nothing but falsification in foodstuffs and manufactures, and it is the poor who are exposed to this chemical fodder: they alone are the victims of all these mercantile inventions, which could be properly used in a system of trustworthy relationships, but which will be more and more harmful until the close of civilisation.”<sup>45</sup>

The system of individual property (which Fourier calls “simple property”, as against social property) wreaks havoc in the same way. Notice, in passing, this formulation, bolder than anything Ruskin wrote on the subject, and which corresponds very exactly to Morris’s feelings:

“Such is the principle of simple property, the right to manage general interests arbitrarily for the satisfaction of individual whims. Thus one sees full licence accorded to vandals who conceive a fancy to compromise salubriousness and adornment by grotesque constructions, sometimes more costly than a good and fine building.”<sup>46</sup>

Another blot upon civilisation (and Morris was to be of the same opinion) was parasitism. Fourier ranks among parasites:

“three quarters of the women of the town and half of those of the countryside, through absorption with household chores and domestic ties . . . three quarters of children, quite useless in towns and little use in the country . . . three quarters of household servants, non-productive . . . armies and navies . . . the legions of the administration . . . customs . . . rural police, gamekeepers, spies etc. . . . all complicating administrations, such as finance and others . . . a good half of manufacturers . . . nine tenths of merchants and commercial agents . . . two thirds of agents for sea and land transport . . . unemployed . . . sophists . . . idlers, people of good class, spending their lives doing nothing . . . prisoners, “Scissionnaires” in open rebellion against industry, laws, customs and usages . . . agents of positive destruction; those who organise famine or pestilence or concur in war . . . agents of negative creation . . .”

and by this last term Fourier understands those who engage in “unproductive”, “illusory”, or “baleful” works.<sup>47</sup>

Setting all these parasites to work and establishing a “harmonian” order will permit the rapid achievement of a state of general well-being:

“The first of all conditions to be fulfilled, the condition without which

it is not possible without foolishness to make men live in good sense together, is the creation of an abundance of goods, a social fortune.”<sup>48</sup>

There, in the midst of thoughts which are frequently idealistic, is a basic materialist principle to make Morris that much more receptive of Marx's philosophy.

Fourier has other innovatory ideas which certainly raised an echo in our poet's thinking, particularly where education is concerned:

“Harmonian education, in its methods, tends to encourage the development from the earliest age of instinctive vocations, applying each individual to the different functions for which nature intends him, and from which he is diverted by the civilised method which usually, with rare exceptions, employs everyone in ways opposed to his vocation.”<sup>49</sup>

With Morris, this free development of aptitudes takes a more detached and less vocational form. For him, the aim of education is far less the preparation for definite functions than the full development and happiness of the child. The similarity remains, and on close examination lies less in the ultimate aims than in the methods:

“The two cherubic and seraphic tribes are to be trained practically rather than mentally. There will be no attempt, as there is in present education, to turn them into precocious wiseacres, intellectual prodigies initiated into scientific subtleties at the age of six; rather to be sought is mechanical precocity; ability in bodily activity which, far from retarding the culture of the mind, accelerates it . . .”<sup>50</sup>

“Here the children will not be brought up by their parents nor by tutors, but by themselves, simply by rivalry between different groups. They will certainly have the assistance of older choirs, and by directors of teaching; but each child will be completely free, will work and study only as much as he pleases, and, with this complete freedom, he will be attracted into taking an interest in all agricultural, manufacturing and scientific processes, to excel in some, to touch upon others, then to develop ideas upon the whole and consequently in the totality of the phalange and of all the series.”<sup>51</sup>

Here we already find the germ of the polytechnic education that Marx dreamed of, but, in the details, the influence of Fourier seems to have outlived that of Marx with Morris.

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One could not, however, say that Morris's communism derives in the very least from Fourier's institutional conceptions. The single idea which might have his support is that of the autonomy of local communities:

“The organisation of the Commune is the cornerstone of the social edifice, however vast and perfect it may be.”<sup>52</sup>

But phalansterian regimentation filled him with horror, and he even tended to see in the phalanstery a sort of charitable hospice or even a kind of

workhouse. This is certainly suggested by certain violent remarks in his 1888 lecture, *The Society of the Future*,<sup>53</sup> and those which he puts into the mouth of old Hammond in *News from Nowhere*:

“The Fourierist phalangsteries and all their kind, as was but natural at the time, implied nothing but a refuge from mere destitution. Such a way of life as that could only have been conceived of by people surrounded by the worst form of poverty.”<sup>54</sup>

On this subject, we have no writing of Morris earlier than 1888. As we shall see later, it is probable that this violent revulsion was not immediate. During the first years of his career of militancy he seems, on the contrary, to have been fairly favourably disposed towards a communal organisation of life, and his first anticipations of town planning, with their community services, are not free from a certain whiff of Fourierism. But as his assimilation of the Marxist theory of two stages deepened, his vision of communist society, freed from all the constraints of the first phase, a society of freedom and abundance, became incompatible with so restrictive a system.

In fact, this is the least one can say of the phalansterian model, which organises life to the limit in its tiniest details. From childhood Fourier loved military parades and went to the changing of the guard at the Tuileries every morning. Existence during every moment in the phalanstery, the composition of groups and series, are described throughout his work with mathematical complexity and rigidity. It is a little amusing, too, that Fourier's most faithful exegetist, Victor Considérant, was a captain of engineers and a former pupil of the Ecole Polytechnique. While Saint-Simon probably put Morris off by his tendency towards abstract generalisation, Fourier in his turn put him off by an orgy of precise regimentation.

The very description of the buildings of the phalanstery, uniform in type, was enough to fill him with horror at their barrack-like aspect:<sup>55</sup> they surround the “ceremonial courtyard, in which take place the industrial manoeuvres of arrival, departure and parade”.<sup>56</sup> The Phalange, Considérant tells us, “is a compact body manoeuvring like a trained army”,<sup>57</sup> and the groups which compose it,

“rivalling one another in ardour and fine appearance, deploy themselves in the plains and take up positions in the hills, like campaigning armies, with their work uniforms, their carts, their equipment painted in the colours of each industrial battalion”.<sup>58</sup>

But let Fourier speak for himself:

“If today we could see an organised canton, see thirty industrial groups coming out on parade at dawn from the Palace of the Phalange, spreading out into fields and workshops, waving their banners with cries of triumph and impatience, we would seem to be seeing bands of frenzied troops about to put neighbouring cantons to fire and sword.”<sup>59</sup>

It is clearly not any picture of this kind that we shall find in *News from Nowhere*, and Mackail is perfectly justified in supposing that the horror aroused by Bellamy's industrial armies carries on the horror that the description of the phalansteries had inspired in Morris.<sup>60</sup> When drafting with Bax *Socialism, its*



*Growth and Outcome*, Morris strove, and one can sense the effort, to keep calm when reproaching Fourier with "formulating dogmatically an elaborate scheme of life in all its details". All details, he stresses, "are carried out by him most minutely, the number of each phalanstery being settled at 1600 souls". Such a scheme "could never be carried out, however good the principles on which it was based might be".<sup>61</sup>

If only phalansterian society were the beginning of an egalitarian world! Unfortunately it is nothing of the kind: neither inheritance, nor private property, nor capital, nor interest are abolished. Quite the contrary, for Fourier's mathematical and almost maniacal subtlety is fully deployed to demonstrate that for the owner of capital the phalanstery is the most profitable of investments, while still providing considerable advantages for the totally dispossessed.

"So that the struggle between capital and labour may be brought to an end," explains Considérant, "capital and labour must be organised in unison, and not just the workers by themselves."<sup>62</sup>

Social justice will intervene with the share-out, which must be, for each individual, "proportional to his contribution to production, calculated with regard to the amount of Capital, Work and Talent which he has supplied".<sup>63</sup> Fourier's utopia maintains the social hierarchy and the distinction between rich and poor, who occupy different quarters in the phalanstery. This hatred of equality is sharply singled out in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, where the division of goods between capital and labour is described as "fantastic".<sup>64</sup> Victor Considérant, who has a gift for precise formulation, is crystal clear:

"Association and Community are very different and are even opposed . . . Nothing is equal and nothing is in common: in the Phalanstery there are distinctions everywhere, and very graduated distinctions, at that."<sup>65</sup>

This anti-egalitarianism is accompanied by a marked aversion for any revolutionary movement. All his life, Fourier retained bitter memories of his blighted hopes at Lyons and Besançon between 1793 and 1796. He rejects the idea of the class struggle and it must be said that the very idea of class is very vague in his mind. The purpose of the Fourierist plan is to suppress this struggle, the existence of which he denies, but which is a blot upon civilisation.

"Division and war are there, indeed! and well did the bourgeoisie recognise the fact when it shouted with all the power of its lungs, *the barbarians are at our gates!*"<sup>66</sup>

A curious and interesting formulation which, we can be sure, was imprinted upon Morris's mind, because it contains the germ of the resolution of the dialectical contradiction between barbarism and socialism, which occupied his thoughts for a long time and which will be the subject of special study.<sup>67</sup> There is, then, at the bottom of Fourier's utopia, a counter-revolutionary and petty-bourgeois ideology. The transformation of society, in consequence, will not be the result of a seizure of power or even of political reforms. It will be "the act of the prince". All his life Fourier dissipated his energy in approaches to ministers, industrial magnates and financiers, and he vainly awaited day by day the noonday arrival of the "candidate", whose ring on the doorbell would

herald the transformation of the world, "the attempt made by a sovereign or an opulent individual . . . or perhaps by a powerful company".<sup>68</sup> The great illusion of Fourier and Considérant was to think that the creation of a single phalanstery in the midst of civilisation would provide an irresistible and contagious example:

"From the moment a single harmonic social element has been set up, harmony and happiness will at once spread like a conflagration across the world."<sup>69</sup>

This trait, common to all pre-Marxist socialists, was the object of especially sharp condemnation in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, to which I shall return when the time comes to draw conclusions as to the influence exerted by "utopian socialism".

\* \* \*

From this miscellaneous assortment, where the best rubs elbows with the worst, Morris, as usual, drew selectively, and it was Fourier's theories upon work which exerted an influence upon his utopian thinking which was, if not decisive, certainly a very long way from being negligible. In a lecture in 1885, after rapidly quoting the names of socialists of the first half of the century, he added at once:

"Amongst these Fourier is the one that calls for most attention: since his doctrine of the necessity and possibility of making labour attractive is one which Socialism can by no means do without."<sup>70</sup>

This was not a passing burst of enthusiasm. In 1890, reviewing *Fabian Essays* for the readers of *Commonweal*, he felt moved to write:

"Fourier put forward his truly inspired doctrine of attractive industry to a world that *could* not listen to him, so sunken as it was in misery and slavery."<sup>71</sup>

That was the year of the writing of *News from Nowhere*, and it is noteworthy that in the story old Hammond, referring to the general abhorrence of work during the capitalist period, asserts that this was produced by the economic system of the period and could not survive it. "Fourier," he adds, "whom all men laughed at, understood the matter better."<sup>72</sup> Three years later, when Morris was preparing with Bax the theoretical manual of socialism, the very nature of the work obliged him to be precise in his judgment, and, as I have already explained, everything concerning work was probably due to Morris's personal thinking. This is all the more probable since reference to Fourier's message appears in two quite separate sections of the book. First, there is the general judgment on the doctrine, inspired by Engels's pamphlet, into which he inserts this phrase:

"The most valuable idea was the possibility and necessity of apportioning due labour to each capacity, and thereby assuring that it should always be pleasant."<sup>73</sup>

But this quick hint was too brief for his liking. The last chapter of the book is

devoted to an anticipation of what work will be like in the new society, and there he feels the need to acknowledge his debt at greater length:

"With a very few exceptions Fourier was right in asserting that all labour could be made pleasurable under certain conditions. These conditions are, briefly: freedom from anxiety as to livelihood; shortness of hours in proportion to the stress of the work; variety of occupation if the work is of its nature monotonous; *due* use of machinery, i.e. the use of it in labour which is essentially oppressive if done by the hand; opportunity for everyone to choose the occupation suitable to his capacity and idiosyncrasy; and lastly, the solacing of labour by the introduction of ornament, the making of which is enjoyable to the labourer." <sup>74</sup>

Morris is plainly making additions and, in his enthusiasm, attributing his own ideas to Fourier. There is very little use of machines in the latter's utopia. True, he does dream of great undertakings like the cutting of the isthmuses of Suez and Panama, or the conquest of the Sahara, but he only envisages their execution by means of "ten and twenty millions of arms". <sup>75</sup> His imagination is more fertile over the material organisation of the phalanstery where there will be installed "hydraulic tubes", trapdoors and hoists. Also to be found there will be manufacturing workshops, relegated to the ends of the buildings, about the working of which we are told very little and which appear to fulfil a secondary, intermittent or purely psychological rôle:

"The social order envisages manufacture only as a complement to agriculture, the means to provide diversion during the emotional doldrums which would break out during the long damp of winter idleness and the equatorial rains." <sup>76</sup>

All that does not go very far and it would be ungracious to blame Fourier, bearing in mind the conditions of his day. To discover therein a theory as to the use of machines is not very serious-minded.

With this reservation, one cannot deny that Fourier's ideas tend in the direction later taken by Morris's. On the first point mentioned in the list we have just cited, the agreement is automatic. It is clearly necessary

"that people enjoy, in the new order, a guarantee of well-being, of a sufficient minimum in the present and the future, and that this guarantee should free him from all anxiety for himself and his dependents." <sup>77</sup>

Except that Morris was in no way satisfied with this minimum, which was justified by Fourier's anti-egalitarianism.

The fundamental idea is that of pleasure in work.

"But if industriousness is the lot which the Creator has assigned to us, how are we to believe that he would wish to drive us to it by violence, and not be able to bring into play some more noble impulse, some bait capable of transforming work into pleasure." <sup>78</sup>

Stripped of its religious wrappings, this idea provides the basis for Morris's utopia. "The characteristic of a good social order," writes V. Considérant, "is the general organisation of attractive-productive work." <sup>79</sup> This organisation is based upon a judicious utilisation of human passions which are "of all God's



works the most perfect and most sublime".<sup>80</sup> One does not argue, says Fourier, over "whether God was right or wrong to give humans this or that passion; social order makes use of them, changing nothing, just as God gave them".<sup>81</sup> Upon which he erects a serial classification of passions of fantastic complexity, which Morris, of course, leaves on one side and which I will spare the reader. Man is motivated by multiple passions which in Fourier's system take on forms often stereotyped and crazy, each one of which can be applied to a specific task. Pleasure results from the accord between the "passionate attraction" and the chosen occupation. But since these attractions are numerous, all must find satisfaction in equal accord. In this theory one can surely detect poor Fourier's personal revolt against his lifelong condemnation to commercial tasks and paperwork which he loathed. "Life is one long torment," he exclaims, "for anybody performing unattractive functions."<sup>82</sup> With a generosity and social sense which command respect, he did not confine himself to personal complaints:

"Health is necessarily impaired if a man devotes himself for twelve hours to unvarying work, weaving, sewing, writing or anything else which does not exercise in turn the different parts of the body and the brain . . . Various chemical factories, glassworks and even cloth manufactories are veritable murderers of workpeople, through the single factor of continuous work."<sup>83</sup>

The solution is to be found in the exercise of a fundamental passion of man which he calls the Butterfly and defines thus:

"The Alternant, or Butterfly, is the need for periodic variety, contrasting situations, changes of scene, stimulating incidents, novelties apt to create illusions, stimulating at once both senses and mind. This need makes itself felt mildly hour by hour, and strongly every two hours. If it is not satisfied, man falls into indifference and apathy."<sup>84</sup>

It is therefore necessary in a Phalanstery "to vary the industrial spells about eight times daily",<sup>85</sup> and for the longest to be "limited to two hours". Without this arrangement, adds Fourier,

"an individual could not participate in thirty series; consequently the harmony of sharing and the mechanism of industrial attraction would be vitiated, long sessions would hamper the passion called Butterfly, the urge to flit from pleasure to pleasure."<sup>86</sup>

From this derives a complicated organisation, founded upon the principle of "geared" activity, which Fourier explains in this way:

"A man may be:  
at five o'clock in the morning in a group of shepherds;  
at seven o'clock in a group of ploughmen;  
at nine o'clock in a group of gardeners.

. . . In the succession I have just indicated, the three series of shepherding, ploughing and gardening will be geared together by reciprocal interlocking of the members.

This enmeshment does not need to be general, so that twenty men oc-

cupied among the sheep from five to six-thirty would then all go ploughing from six-thirty to eight: it is simply required that each series provide the others with several members drawn from each of its groups, so as to establish links among them for the enmeshing of various members functioning alternatively in one and another".

Apart from the rigidity of time and the complexity, this is rather the way in which things happen in *News from Nowhere*. Perhaps Fourier's system is more efficient, but the only element of it which Morris chose to retain was that "the chief source of gaiety among Harmonians is the frequent variation of sessions".<sup>87</sup> For Morris, their duration was far less important; that was just a matter of temperament. What he specially admired was the care taken to adapt tasks precisely to each individual's ability, in order to make them pleasant, and he was struck by the sometimes odd forms under which this care sometimes showed itself:

"his dictum that children, who generally like making dirt-pies and getting into a mess, should do the dirty work of the community, may at least be looked on as an illustration of this idea".<sup>88</sup>

Morris appears not to have realised that Fourier's employment of children in this way was his solution to the problem of the disagreeable tasks which Thomas More assigned to slaves and he himself to machines: it provides a striking example of the connection between the development of productive forces and ideology.

In the range of passions which must be sublimated from the "subversive" state to the "harmonic" state, the Butterfly, whose function is to create joy by the adaptation of the individual to the task which suits him and by diversifying occupation, is to be joined by the Cabalist and the Composite. The Cabalist, which is emulation between groups, appears to have held little attraction for Morris who must have seen it as a modified survival of capitalist competition and scarcely seems to have considered it other than as a possibility of the first stage. The Composite, on the other hand, claims our attention. It contains the germ of Morris's ideal of the full development of man. I do not in the least dare to claim any direct influence, but (is it sheer coincidence?) we find that the examples given by Fourier are exactly the same as those we find later in Morris:

"Love is only beautiful to the extent it is combined love, uniting the charms of the senses to those of the spirit. It becomes triviality or deceit if it is confined to one of the other of these two provinces.

... The *composite* commands respect to such an extent that in every sphere we agree in looking down on those devoted to solitary pleasure. If a man provides himself with excellent food and excellent wines in order to enjoy them alone, he exposes himself to well-deserved jeers. But if the same man gathers together a chosen company, and they taste the pleasures of the senses in good fare and those of the spirit in friendship at the same time, he will be praised, because his banquets will provide compound pleasure and not simple."<sup>89</sup>

But let us return to joy in work, which remains the major theme. In Fourier

we find an exaltation of physical effort which foreshadows the pleasures of "easy-hard work" so dear to Morris:

"This plough, so hateful today, will be guided by the young prince as by the young plebeian; it will be a kind of *industrial tournament*, with each athlete displaying his vigour and dexterity, to shine before the fair sex, who will close the proceedings by bringing lunch or a snack." <sup>90</sup>

Did Morris have a memory of this picture when he described the hefty lads repairing the Bloomsbury road, in *News from Nowhere*? This slant resolves the contradiction which Morris hated between work and leisure:

"Oh, heavens! I'm quite willing, they are amusements. But why are these occupations amusements? That is what you must understand; and when you have worked out why, think about seeing whether all the occupations of science, agriculture, manufacture, art, etc., which make up Industry, cannot in some way be changed into amusements – because such amusements exist. That is the whole point." <sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, there is one whole aspect of Fourier's doctrine which Morris firmly rejects. It is necessary, writes Fourier, "for the division of labour to be carried to the ultimate in order to provide each sex and every age with suitable occupations." <sup>92</sup> In this way a particular horticulturist can pass from one to another of the most diverse arboricultural series, steadily restricting himself to the operation of grafting, if that is his "passionate attraction", other operations being reserved to other specialists, other monomaniacs, one is tempted to say. "The division of labour," declares Considérant, "does not inhibit variation of work; on the contrary, it is eminently suited to it"; <sup>93</sup> and he seems even to outbid Fourier:

"... Sub-division within the Group is the true guarantee of the Individual Independence of the worker, and of the Free Development of Vocations, for it permits each one to devote himself solely, I will not say to functions, but to those *details* of functions for which he feels taste, aptitude and inclination." <sup>94</sup>

Such a theory is obviously contrary to the absolute condemnation of the division of labour expressed by Morris, following Marx and Ruskin. It contradicts the idea, inherited from Ruskin, that the separation between conception and execution must be done away with and the craftsman be given complete freedom of self-expression in all parts of his work. It contradicts the Marxist idea of the "whole man" who will come into his own in communist society. This clash between Morris and Fourier is neither formal nor accidental. It derives from a profound difference of intent. For our poet, the purpose of communism is to ensure man's happiness. For the phalansterian utopist, the aim is to ensure a continuous increase in production; the utilisation of emotional attractions and pleasure in work have no other end. As Edouard Guyot pertinently remarks,

"for him, that is quite legitimate, for under the régime which he proposes, and which involves property, one has to be concerned with men's profit, and not just with their happiness". <sup>95</sup>



It is not only the level of productive forces, but also production relationships which determine ideology.

Among the merits which Morris attributes to Fourier in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, I have mentioned that of having advocated "the lightening of labour by the introduction of decorative creation agreeable to the worker". This suggestion is rather odd, because one cannot claim that this element plays an outstanding part in the pleasure which the phalansterians find in their labour. I cannot help imagining that, in composing their manual, Morris and Bax did not find themselves in complete harmony over their assessment, and that the latter, in Morris's eyes, made the mistake of underestimating the value of Fourier's message; and I am inclined to think that in the last chapter, dealing with work in the future society, a subject upon which Morris had pondered more deeply than his collaborator, he took the opportunity of introducing praise of the phalansterian utopist and pushing it as far as he could. In fact, if we go to Fourier himself, thoughts of an aesthetic order really are extremely rare. It is necessary, of course, "for the workshops and fields to attract the worker by their elegance and well-kept appearance".<sup>96</sup> Sometimes, however, he does become more eloquent:

"Manufactures, though eminently suitable, could not exercise any attraction if the workshops of the phalange were disgustingly filthy, as are ours, which, by their meanness do not lend themselves to any pleasing arrangement, any comfort or anything inspiring enthusiasm. Comfort is the first requisite of attraction, so it is difficult for that to arise in an industry from which comfort is excluded. That is the vice of all our civilised workshops.

But if the confectionery seristry is built for a mass of five or six hundred people: men, women and children, with luxury in dress and tools of the trade, it will be possible, even in the oven room, which is the dirtiest place, to introduce elegance. A range of ovens decorated with different marbles, walls frequently repainted grey or brown, borders which are often renewed. The other, unsmoky rooms will be suited to all kinds of decoration."<sup>97</sup>

All that is very interesting, and Morris expresses on a number of occasions the same desire to beautify and enrich the place of work in the future society.<sup>98</sup> But there is not the least suggestion of introducing this aesthetic joy, which pervades the whole of Morris's utopia, into work itself. And for that reason Fourierism is only a partial and complementary inspiration of it. On this point Morris was far more lucid than we might suppose from the laudatory summary in the manual of socialism and, at the same time, the text we are about to read confirms my supposition concerning the collaboration with Bax. In the preface to Ruskin's *Nature of Gothic*, we find, in fact, this judgment which seems to me to define perfectly the nature and the limits of Fourier's influence:

"Charles Fourier dealt with the subject at great length, and the whole of his elaborate system for the reconstruction of society is founded on the certain hope of gaining pleasure in labour. But in their times neither Owen nor Fourier could possibly have found the key to the problem with which Ruskin was provided. Fourier depends, not on art for the motive

power of the realization of pleasure in labour, but on incitements, which, although they would not be lacking in any decent state of society, are rather incidental than essential parts of pleasurable work; and on reasonable arrangements, which would certainly lighten the burden of labour, but would not procure for it the element of sensuous pleasure, which is the essence of all true art. Nevertheless, it must be said that Fourier and Ruskin were touched by the same instinct, and it is instructive and hopeful to note how they arrived at the same point by such very different roads."<sup>99</sup>

It is difficult to define more clearly the dividing line between the internal and external elements of utopia. And yet this delimitation leaves us with a feeling of injustice. If the aesthetic expression of human effort, with all the conception of man and society that these terms involve, was for Morris the essential internal element, is one not entitled to think that variety of occupation, conceived no longer as a stimulus to production and profit, but as the other condition for man's full development is also an internal element of Morris's humanism?

#### 4. Louis Blanc

In their rapid bird's-eye view of "utopian socialism" in France, Morris and Bax touch briefly on several other systems: those of Lammenais, Pierre Leroux, Cabet and Louis Blanc. On the first two, I have nothing to say, and one may wonder whether they ever attracted Morris's attention. Perhaps he read *Icarie*; he must at least have had an indirect acquaintance with it, since I have found, in a manuscript of H. A. Barker's,<sup>100</sup> the mention, in an undated list of lectures given by the Socialist League, of a talk by G. Brocher upon the Icarian communities. However, there is little likelihood that this carefully regulated utopia, uniformed and verging on the police state, would greatly have attracted him. On the contrary, and without being prepared to venture definite assertions, I am inclined to think that he must have read Louis Blanc's *Organisation du travail* with some interest, although we do not find any mention of it outside the socialist handbook. I have several reasons for the supposition.

First there is, clearly, the evidence of Bruce Glasier, to which I have already referred, to the extent to which we can trust his memory. There is the fact that, in the Mill article which made such an impression upon Morris, three pages are devoted to Louis Blanc: one might expect that reading this would have aroused his interest in the same way as the six pages devoted to V. Considérant. There is also, in his anticipation of revolutionary happenings as related by old Hammond in *News from Nowhere*, the creation by the desperate bourgeoisie of government factories, which exactly correspond to Louis Blanc's description.<sup>101</sup> I readily concede that this last argument is no proof, because this reminiscence might just as well have derived from a knowledge of the historical facts of 1848 as from a knowledge of texts.

It must be admitted that the ideology which is revealed by these texts held nothing very attractive to Morris. In the words of Louis Blanc himself, it "rests upon deeply felt idealism".<sup>102</sup> It defines, in idealist terms, the State placed above social classes.<sup>103</sup> It is steadfastly opposed to any idea of revolution:

"there is no question . . . of displacing wealth",<sup>104</sup> and "capitalists would be called into the association and would receive interest upon the capital they invested".<sup>105</sup> In all, it is necessary "to reform society without overturning it",<sup>106</sup> and the change envisaged consists of "bringing together all classes in society and making them understand that their interests are coincident".<sup>107</sup> If Louis Blanc's book had contained nothing but these assertions which, in Morris's eyes, could only be opportunistic platitudes, I would shut it up without going any further. But there was more.

The place given to Louis Blanc in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome* is relatively generous. The essential part of it deals with the historical rôle played by the French theorist, and this rôle is judged severely, not so much on account of the Revolution of 1848, in which his ideas were admitted to have been travestied, as on account of his repudiation of 1871 and his rallying to the cause of Versailles. But in this account, at once biographical and theoretical, two facts strike us. First, stress is laid upon Louis Blanc's Corsican ancestry on his mother's side and upon a family incident which might have inspired an Alexandre Dumas story. Morris loved reading the novels of Dumas and it is not very likely that Bax indulged in such frivolous reading; so it seems clear to me that Morris had a hand in drafting the account dealing particularly with the *Organisation du travail*. Now, this book is full of strange contradictions. In the midst of the reformist ideas I have picked out, there are others which approach an egalitarianism very close to the Babouvist ideology, some of which go a very long way.

"In this work," write Morris and Bax, "he put forward the genuine Socialist maxim of 'From each according to his capacity; to each according to his needs' as the basis of the production of a true society." <sup>108</sup>

The authors exaggerate and are reasoning *a posteriori*. This formula is not found in the work of Louis Blanc, but, in default of the letter, we find the essential spirit:

"In the Saint-Simonian doctrine, the problem of sharing out profits is resolved by the famous formula: *from each according to his ability, to each ability according to its works*. In our project, inequality of aptitude is only transitorily made the basis for the differentiation of reward, and that with important restrictions. So that what forms the moral principle of Saint-Simonism is only, in our project, a necessary concession to ideas which we consider to be false and which we hope to see replaced through education, by ideas of high moral worth." <sup>109</sup>

Louis Blanc completes the expression of this idea in the following terms:

"Although the false and antisocial education given to the present generation makes it difficult to seek a motive for emulation and encouragement other than in an increase of reward, salaries would be equal, and an entirely new education would change ideas and customs." <sup>110</sup>

It is not strange that this passage should give Morris food for thought, following ideas expressed by the Babouvists on the same subject. Fundamentally he was in favour of this egalitarianism, but, with the later enlightenment



of Marxist thinking, he realised that here the problem of "unequal right" is very badly posed. In the first place, the inevitable period of transition is accepted unwillingly and is shortened in a subjective, arbitrary and aggressive way. Only the Marxist theory of two stages, based upon a scientific understanding of economic laws and historical development, appreciating the material impossibility of skipping stages, can provide a solution. Secondly, this solution, which Louis Blanc envisages through the idealistic means of education and morality, depends, for Morris as for Marx, upon the revolutionary transformation of productive relationships and the surge forward of productive forces resulting from it. Effective equality can only be achieved in the communism of abundance. If, in their handbook, Morris and Bax regard Louis Blanc as a precursor, it is from a corrective angle. They take the precaution of accusing him of never having

"grasped the great truth that only through the class struggle can the regeneration of society be accomplished".<sup>111</sup>

In other words, Louis Blanc's propositions are valid at the level reached in the second stage. Within this corrected perspective, Morris will accept up to a certain point the idea that "it is not to the inequality of rights that the inequality of abilities should lead, but to the inequality of duties".<sup>112</sup> The formulation must have appealed to him, but the moral concept underlying it probably appeared ridiculous to him. The notion, deeply rooted in him and drawn from Ruskin and Fourier, of pleasure in work, would render any ethical imperative supererogatory. Curiously enough, Louis Blanc, without noticing the contradiction, himself corrected his formulation by declaring:

"Is it not true that truly superior men have always sought and found their chief reward in the very exercise of their abilities?"<sup>113</sup>

Upon that point, Morris's agreement was complete, and this idea, taken up in the conditions of the second stage, abundantly justified the egalitarian ideology of his own utopia. In this sense, the thoughts engendered by reading Louis Blanc make an incontestable contribution to the development of his thinking.

## 5. Robert Owen

Contrary to all expectations, it is not possible to find any inspiration or source for Morris's utopia in Owenism. In fact, it is the negation of it, and, as we shall quickly discover, Owen's theories had no effect other than that of reinforcing Morris's political thinking by reaction.

It is altogether probable that Morris read Owen's works. Memories recalled by Mackail indicate that in 1883 he was speaking enthusiastically about him.<sup>114</sup> We also have the evidence, already mentioned, of Bruce Glasier. It is not without interest to note also that his Edinburgh correspondent and friend, John Glasse, was the author of a book upon Owen,<sup>115</sup> and that another close friend, Andreas Scheu, in 1885 gave a lecture at Hammersmith on Owen, Marx and Blanqui.<sup>116</sup> However, it is difficult for us to say which books Morris might have read. The only one of which we find the title in his writings is *The Book of the New Moral World*, and that again is in the theoretical handbook

written with Bax, which undermines any certainty. As it happens, it does not seem to me that this uncertainty is very serious. It would be difficult, in fact, to find anything in Morris's writings that constituted a direct reminiscence. Above all, on the various occasions when he refers to Owen, the judgments which he makes concern the man, his public rôle and his influence much more than his works.

For the man he had immense admiration. He calls him "the most generous and best of men".<sup>117</sup> He was

"representative of the nobler hopes of his day . . . and the lifter of the torch of Socialism amidst the dark days of the confusion consequent on the reckless greed of the early period of the great factory industries".<sup>118</sup>

He was "a born philanthropist in the better sense of the word, and from the first showed in all matters unbounded generosity and magnanimity"; he was, he repeats, "the most humane of men".<sup>119</sup> He praises him because he "showed how by companionship and good will labour might be made at least endurable",<sup>120</sup> while still reproaching him, as he did Fourier, for not having understood the real nature of pleasure in work. He praises him even more for having proved "that the conditions under which man lived could affect his life and his deeds infinitely".<sup>121</sup> His "theory of the perfectibility of man by the amelioration of his surroundings"<sup>122</sup> is perhaps Owen's single positive contribution to the maturation of Morris's thought: we can, it seems to me, regard it as a decisive stage in the deconceptualisation of Morris's humanism, and as a direct preparation for the assimilation of the practical humanism of Marx and Engels.

I will search no further, because, for the rest, Morris's judgments are severely critical. This is not a reason for us to neglect them, because it was to a certain extent through opposition to Owen that Morris negatively defined his own conception of the "great change". What he primarily reproaches him with is believing that socialist reforms in isolation, even the most far-reaching, were possible within the framework of capitalist society. The cooperative movement, of which Owen was "the first great champion", seemed a will-o'-the-wisp to him, arising from a failure to understand that nothing "short of universal co-operation would solve the social question".<sup>123</sup> It is an out-of-date theory, and, therefore, reactionary:

"Since the days of Robert Owen the position of Co-operation has been quite changed by the uprising of *revolutionary* Socialism as a result of the application of the doctrine of evolution to human society, and the consequent perception of the class-struggle. The Co-operationists of Robert Owen's time did not perceive the existence of the class-struggle." <sup>124</sup>

In the theoretical handbook, we find the same reproach that "he ignored also the antagonism of classes".<sup>125</sup> I shall only record here criticisms on the problem of co-operation directed against Owen by name. I should need many pages to consider all his catalogue of complaints of a general nature: the co-operative movement has had no result other than creating a collective form of capitalism, making the workers lose their class consciousness, and strengthening the aristocracy of labour.

Even more than against co-operation (and this is of more direct interest to

us) Morris takes issue against the utopian experiments of Owen and his followers. This was all the more necessary because, in the 'eighties, the word communism, for the ill-educated public of his readers and listeners, evoked nothing but the memory of Owenite communities. The confusion was in danger of being perpetuated as a consequence of the adhesion to the Socialist League of a certain number of survivors of the movement, such as the strange and picturesque Craig.<sup>126</sup> So Morris makes a point of being explicit; thus, in the course of his controversy with the anarchists in 1889, he writes in *Commonweal*:

"Comrade H. Davis misunderstands my use of the word Communist in supposing me to use it as the Owenites did, as implying life in separate communities, whether those communities were mere scattered accidents amidst a capitalist society or not; whereas I use it as a more accurate term for Socialism as implying equality of condition and consequent abolition of private property."<sup>127</sup>

Owen's experiments, he repeats in the socialist handbook, "could never develop out of the experimental stage so long as the constitution of Society implies the upholding of the so-called 'rights of property' ".<sup>128</sup>

"Such experiments are of their nature non-progressive; at their best they are but another form of the Mediaeval monastery, withdrawals from the society of the day, really implying hopelessness of a general change."<sup>129</sup>

It is not possible

"to establish a real Socialistic community in the midst of Capitalistic Society, a social island amidst an individual sea: because all its external dealings would have to be arranged on a basis of capitalistic exchange and would so far support the system of profits and unpaid labour".<sup>130</sup>

That is why these experiments are doomed "to failure and extinction",<sup>131</sup> with the result that the bourgeoisie "has cried out mockery against Socialism over the ruins". They rest upon a foolish illusion, the same as that of Fourier and Considérant:

"Robert Owen thought that if the advantages of a communal or co-operative life were only shown to people clearly enough, they would embrace it as people take to a new form of theology; forgetting that the chain which binds them is real enough and that mere hope and example of the success of such a life on a small scale will not break that chain which it has taken so many centuries to forge."<sup>132</sup>

Owen's experimental utopism was a dead end, and deflected some workers from Chartism, which contained "far more socialism".<sup>133</sup> Owen, in fact, "looked upon Chartism as an interruption to his co-operative schemes, and deprecated it".<sup>134</sup> He was profoundly ignorant of the class nature of the State, and his socialism

"fell short of its object because it did not understand that, so long as there is a privileged class in possession of the executive power, they will



take good care that their economical position, which enables them to live on the unpaid labour of the people, is not tampered with".<sup>135</sup>

That is why such experiments have proved to be "anti-Socialistic, as they withdrew themselves from general society – from political society".<sup>136</sup> So, "those who are young in the movement" need to be put on their guard:

"Although as experiments in association something may be learned from them, their conditions of life have no claim to the title of Communism, which most unluckily has often been applied to them. Communism can never be realised till the present system of Society has been destroyed by the workers taking hold of the political power."<sup>137</sup>

This example of Morris's reaction to Owen is most significant, and shows us very clearly that the most positive effect of pre-Marxist socialism was to lead him to write an anti-utopian utopia.

## 6. Henry George

From the defeat of Chartism until the 'eighties, political socialism in England was in the doldrums. It lived on memories, Owenism continued sporadically in co-operation and in utopian experiments; the working class allowed itself to be influenced to a slight degree by Christian socialism, and even less by moralising positivism; the theories of Samuel Smiles and Malthus were preached by the ruling class; an aristocracy of labour came into being and spread an ideology of selfishness and social collaboration. Marxism was still unknown, and Engels could write to Marx on 7 October 1858:

"The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as* a bourgeoisie."<sup>138</sup>

England was the workshop of the world, and the power of its ruling class appeared to be unchallenged.

As the 'eighties approached, the situation changed bit by bit. American and German competition made themselves felt and the economy was shaken. A sharp crisis in agriculture aggravated the industrial unease, and that was complicated by the Irish problem and the impoverishment of the Scottish crofters, causing a new exodus to the towns and an increase in poverty and unemployment. The importance of the peasant question at this period has not always been sufficiently regarded by the historians. In any case, it is noteworthy that the revival of socialism in Great Britain was first expressed in movements for land nationalisation or agrarian reforms, and it was this agitation that affected the movement in the towns. This fact must be remembered if one wants to understand the sudden and unprecedented success enjoyed in England by *Progress and Poverty* (1879) by the American Henry George. The author, who was also a very assured orator, made several lecture tours in Britain from 1882 onwards. They were triumphal, and he sold over a hundred thousand copies of his book.<sup>139</sup> His influence upon English socialists, whether social-democratic or Fabian, was of variable duration, but to start with it was universal and considerable.

There is no essential interest for our study in making a deep analysis of George's theories, because Morris soon rejected them and, curiously enough, it was something different, as we shall see, that he retained from his book. Also, these theories can be briefly summarised by borrowing George's own expressions:

"The great cause of inequality in the distribution of wealth is inequality in the ownership of land . . . we must substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership . . . we should not think of giving the landowners any compensation for the land . . . It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent . . . Therefore what I propose is – to appropriate rent by taxation . . . to abolish all taxation save that upon land values."<sup>140</sup>

For a long time, too, a confusion persisted in the minds of readers and listeners, and George seems to have maintained it cunningly, between land nationalisation and the single tax. As he drew away from socialism, this single tax was reduced until it came down to 20%. I add, to give the exact tone of the book's ideology, the expression of a regret: "It is difficult for working-men to get over the idea that there is a real antagonism between capital and labour"; and of a hope, that a new community "may let the labourer have the full reward of his labour and the capitalist the full return of his capital".<sup>141</sup>

Henry George was able to maintain these various or successive ambiguities thanks to the friendship he met with from Hyndman and Joynes of the Social Democratic Federation. The S.D.F. weekly, *Justice*, steadily supported his campaign up to 1886. In his memoirs, published twenty-five years later, Hyndman makes a fairly clear and moderate assessment of the American theorist, which nevertheless betrays a desire to justify the support formerly accorded. He declares that he had believed at that time (and his remark is not without good sense) that *Progress and Poverty* "would induce people to think about economic problems who could never have been brought to read economic books pure and simple", and that "an agitation directed against any form of private property was better than the stereotyped apathy which prevailed all round us". He said he had defended the book to Karl Marx who saw in it "the capitalist's last ditch" and had maintained that the gross errors contained in the book would open the eyes of a great many people by their very enormity. Marx did not see it in this light, and replied that "to have error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality", which questioned Hyndman's standpoint brutally. However, the latter persisted in thinking that

"George's temporary success with his agitational fallacies greatly facilitated the promulgation of Marx's own theories in Great Britain, owing to the fact that the public mind had been stirred up to consider the social question, and political economy generally, by George's easily read book".<sup>142</sup>

This assertion is certainly bold, but perhaps it is not entirely without truth. What one must remember, and what is to our purpose, is that Hyndman persisted for several years in his support for Henry George, against Marx's opinion and, after the latter's death, against that of Engels. In a letter to Sorge on 20 June 1881, Marx made a savage analysis of *Progress and Poverty*.<sup>143</sup> Engels

wrote to Bebel, on 18 January 1884, that Henry George was "a genuine bourgeois" and that his attack upon property in land alone would "not get you far in the foremost industrial country in the world".<sup>144</sup> In his preface to the (1887) American edition of *The Position of the Working Class in Britain*, he observed that "what Henry George demands leaves the present mode of social production untouched".<sup>145</sup>

The recalling of these details is not without point, because it throws light upon Morris's reactions. He seems to have read George's book in 1882 and, soon afterwards, A. R. Wallace's *Land Nationalisation*, which takes up the same theme with variations. He found the latter book "not nearly such a good book as George's".<sup>146</sup> The following year he was a member of the Democratic Federation, and saw as proof of the progress of socialism the fact that "Henry George's book has been received in this country and in America as a new Gospel".<sup>147</sup> After another year had passed, we see from his pen a strange article devoted to George in *Justice*. After praising his qualities as a man and an orator, he writes:

"Granted that the depression throughout the country and the serious state of our agricultural industry helped Mr. George to an attentive hearing, he never spared himself but strove to stir an apathy which has lasted almost unbroken for over thirty years . . . We too desire to overthrow the landlord domination; we too have worked for years to get back the land for the people . . . But we cannot finish, nay we cannot even begin, here. The worst enemies of the people to-day are those whom our 'prophet of California' leaves untouched by his denunciations and unscathed by his sarcasm. To Mr. George the robber of a hundred is a villain indeed: the dexterous annexer of many thousands may pass full-pocketed on his way as a benefactor of the race".<sup>148</sup>

I consider that this article constitutes a turning-point in Morris's ideological evolution. It is noteworthy that he starts with a textual refutation of the arguments of Hyndman, for whom he was still professing an immense admiration, and that he finishes with a condemnation about which one may feel that it faithfully reflects Engels's opinion, probably conveyed by Bax. Here we begin to find ourselves in the presence of the mystery which will concern us in the next chapter.

From then on, the condemnation of Henry George becomes steadily more emphatic, and the reservations which went with it finally disappear. It turns upon the man, whose opportunist development is judged with growing contempt. Morris, so little given to personalities, ends up by declaring that he has "rejoined the capitalist camp".<sup>149</sup> After George took the side of the executioners in the affair of the "Chicago martyrs", he used bold type in the columns of *Commonweal* to label him "TRAITOR",<sup>150</sup> and he never ceased denouncing him as an "enemy of socialism".<sup>151</sup> On the theoretical plane, the condemnation is just as forthright and is expressed without the slightest equivocation in the Manifesto of the Socialist League in 1885:

"Nationalisation of the land alone . . . would be useless so long as labour was subject to the fleecing of surplus value inevitable under the Capitalist system",



and a note attached to the Manifesto recalls that "land is *but one* of the forms of capital".<sup>152</sup>

Was there any point, one may ask, in speaking of Henry George since I have just established so complete a break? Morris's development in regard to him seems to me not to be negligible in the interest it offers, and the article published in *Justice* in 1884 will develop its full significance from the angle of the research to which I shall subject it later. But there is one other thing in *Progress and Poverty* to which contemporaries did not pay any attention and which, all the same, left its mark upon Morris's utopian thought. In the last part of the book there are reflections upon the future socialist society which are taken up by our poet, even in their form of expression. We read there, for example:

"It seems to me that in a condition of society in which no one need fear poverty, no one would desire great wealth . . . For, certainly, the spectacle of men who have only a few years to live, slaving away their time for the sake of dying rich, is in itself so unnatural and absurd, that in a state of society where the abolition of the fear of want had dissipated the envious admiration with which the masses of men now regard the possession of great riches, whoever would toil to acquire more than he cared to use would be looked upon as we would now look on a man who would thatch his head with half a dozen hats, or walk around in the hot sun with an overcoat on." <sup>153</sup>

To illustrate the same idea, Henry George uses another image which we find again in Morris:

"Take a company of well-bred men and women dining together. There is no struggling for food, no attempt on the part of anyone to get more than his neighbour; no attempt to gorge or to carry off. On the contrary, each one is anxious to help his neighbour before he partakes himself; to offer to others the best rather than to pick it out himself . . . They *are* greedy of food when they are not assured that there will be a fair and equitable distribution that will give enough to each . . . An equitable distribution of wealth, by exempting all from the fear of want, would destroy the greed of wealth, just as in polite society the greed of food has been destroyed." <sup>154</sup>

So, reading *Progress and Poverty* in 1882, Morris could already dream of equality amid plenty and the natural limitation of needs. He also found there ideas about work very close to those he drew from Fourier:

"It is not labour in itself that is repugnant to man; it is not the natural necessity for exertion that is a curse; it is only the labour that produces nothing – exertion of which he cannot see the results. To toil day after day, and yet get but the necessities of life, this is indeed hard; it is like the infernal punishment of compelling a man to pump lest he be drowned, or to trudge on a treadmill lest he be crushed. But released from this necessity, men would but work the harder and the better, for then they would work as their inclinations led them; then, would they seem to be really doing something for themselves or for others . . . Work, even of the coarser kinds, would become a lightsome thing. The tendency of modern

production to subdivision would not involve monotony or the contraction of ability in the worker, since toil would be relieved by short hours, by change, by the alternation of intellectual with manual occupations.”<sup>155</sup>

It is, of course, only a question of parallel and complementary inspiration, but this confirmation should not be neglected. In fact, there is much more in *Progress and Poverty*. We find there an almost complete draft for an important idea which forms one of the starting points of Morris's utopia. From an idealist viewpoint which is clearly not Morris's, Henry George depicts the succession of civilisations:

“It is the barbarians of the one epoch who have been the civilized men of the next, to be in their turn succeeded by fresh barbarians . . . Every civilization that has been overwhelmed by barbarians has really perished from internal decay . . . the breaking up and diffusion caused by an incursion of barbarians is necessary to the recommencement of the process and a new growth of civilization.”<sup>156</sup>

Our civilisation, the blemishes of which are vigorously denounced by Henry George, is, then, doomed, and only a new age of barbarism can save the human race. But, he asks,

“Whence shall come the new barbarians? Go through the squalid quarters of great cities, and you may see, even now, their gathering hordes. How shall learning perish? Men will cease to read, and books will kindle fires and be turned into cartridges!”<sup>157</sup>

This prospect, which for Morris represents a gleam of light and a hopeful factor, did not fill Henry George with delight. This self-styled socialist never felt any enthusiasm for revolutionary methods. The barbarism he foreshadowed was to take the form of “imperatorship” and “anarchy” and also – for his fine impulse was lost in a very muddled religious development – of “new forms of superstition, of which possibly Mormonism and other even grosser ‘isms’ may give some vague idea”.<sup>158</sup>

Admittedly he notes the existence of “a vague but general feeling of disappointment, an increased bitterness among the working-classes and a widespread feeling of unrest”.

However, that does not appear to him to open the way to salvation: “If this were accompanied by a definite idea of how relief is to be obtained, it would be a hopeful sign; but it is not so accompanied”.<sup>159</sup> His indecision is complete:

“The civilized world is trembling on the verge of a great movement. Either it must be a leap upward, which will open the way to advances yet undreamed of, or it must be a plunge downward, which will carry us back towards barbarism.”<sup>160</sup>

George's view, as we turn the pages, becomes more gloomy and pessimistic. His book ends in apocalyptic metaphysics and prophecies of glacial catastrophes presaging the death of our planet and its inhabitants. So the only meaning to life is to be found in belief in another life.<sup>161</sup>

All of which does not at all separate us from Morris. We shall see that he too, during the groping years of his utopian search, was obsessed by visions of

catastrophe and one may wonder whether his sudden enthusiasm for Jefferies was not more or less consciously prepared by the reading of Henry George. But that is not the essence. What we must grasp is that nowhere did he find so clear a summary of the problem he needed to resolve, the problem of civilisation and barbarism. But whereas George, after suggesting the existence of the new barbarians in "the squalid quarters of great cities", stopped short, Morris took up the idea in a great burst of enthusiasm inspired by his assimilation of historical and dialectical materialism. For the idealistic struggle. For the "recommencement of the process" he substituted the spiral movement of history. For the cycle: barbarism – civilisation – barbarism, he substituted the alternative: barbarism or socialism, and he triumphantly resolved it in a parable which carried Henry George's hesitant intuitions on to a higher plane.

### 7. Anarchist Literature

There has so often been talk of William Morris's utopian anarchism or anarchic communism that I should doubtless be reproached if I said not a word about it here. In due time, when we consider communist society as he imagined it, we shall have ample opportunity of seeing, basing ourselves upon Morris's own writings, the extent of his hostility to any libertarian ideology.<sup>162</sup>

The fact that the critics, in their majority – I should say, in their near-unanimity – have persisted against the evidence in seeing him as a devotee of that ideology is, due less, I think, to dishonesty than to ignorance. Not a single one of them has realised that Morris's utopia was based upon the Marxist theory of two stages, the second of these stages being communism, an essential characteristic of which is the withering away of the State. But even if the State has finally disappeared, if the government of people has given place to the administration of things, democracy will still acknowledge one law, that of the majority, which anarchism denies. Morris, as we shall see, is completely explicit upon this point. Admittedly, this distant stage of socialism can, if one omits this important reservation, in some ways resemble the society that the anarchists want to establish overnight. Morris himself did not deny it, although he never stopped stressing the differences rather than the resemblances. These being prudently admitted, can we say that with him they resulted from a reading of libertarian literature?

Apart from a fragmentary translation by Seymour of Bakunin, the latter remained unknown in England for a long time, and at the most we may suppose that Morris heard talk about him. There remain Proudhon and Kropotkin. Before turning to their case, I would make one remark. When, in his article in *Justice*, so often quoted (and no less frequently truncated), Morris, in 1894, cast a backward eye and listed the influences which led him to socialism, he wrote:

"Such finish to what education in practical Socialism as I am capable of I received afterwards from some of my Anarchist friends, from whom I learned, quite against their intention, that Anarchism was impossible, much as I learned from Mill against *his* intention that Socialism was necessary."<sup>163</sup>



I might be tempted, after so precise and clear a declaration, to close the enquiry and press no further. In any case, it justifies my not extending it unnecessarily. But there is one point which I would like to underline. It is that, where socialism is concerned, Morris tells us of his reading. As for anarchism, he encountered it, *not by reading*, but from contacts with its followers. In fact, such contacts were many and prolonged within the Socialist League and they finished in bitterness and disruption.

I am inclined to think that he never read Proudhon and he knew of his thinking only through what he learned from Bax and Kropotkin. He only makes a single mention of his name, in 1885, when he is drawing up a list of precursors of socialism, and this juxtaposition is significant in itself, though very understandable at that date. For one thing, theoretical education (even Morris's) was inadequate, and for another, the working-class movement was too weak in the face of all-powerful capitalism, for him to feel it necessary to draw fine distinctions and even less so to be exclusive among the different currents of thought. I may add that there are so many contradictions to be found in Proudhon's works that very different ideologies have found it possible to lay claim to him. At that time he could scarcely have been known at all in England, apart from his famous dictum: "Property is theft"; and that would be enough for him to be considered an ally in the common struggle.

His name appears in the list of readings published in *Commonweal* in 1886, of which I have already spoken. The French titles of several of Proudhon's works are shortened and mangled, and he is credited with a *Histoire de* (sic) *socialisme* which is difficult to identify. I find it difficult to believe that Morris had a hand in drawing up this list. It is only in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, in 1893, that we find a biography of Proudhon and a somewhat severe judgment upon the confusion of his ideas, which repeats in essence Marx's strictures. Clearly, the historical documentation which this passage contains was outside Morris's competence, and, judging by certain details, it can without any risk of error be attributed to Bax, which by no means excludes his having discussed it with Morris and written it with his agreement. In this fragment there is one odd omission. Reference is made to Proudhon's scheme for mutual aid, but none to his federalist ideas, which might be expected to interest Morris. Is it too much to deduce from this, on the one hand, that the latter's participation in the writing is doubtful and, on the other, that Morris's federalism was not directly inspired by Proudhon? In any case, it was an idea that was "in the air" and much discussed in socialist circles.

\* \* \*

Let us come to Kropotkin. The problem is much less simple. If we go by the publication dates of his books, it would seem that the only one which could have had any influence upon Morris's development was the work which appeared in Paris in 1885 under the title of *Paroles d'un Révolté*. *La Conquête du pain* appeared in 1892 and it was only after Morris's death that the *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899) and *Mutual Aid* (1902) appeared. In fact, these dates must not carry too much weight with us, because most of the chapters which make up his books appeared in the form of articles in periodicals in Switzerland (*Le Révolté*) or Britain (*Freedom*),<sup>164</sup> long before being collected together into

volumes, and Morris might have known of them, particularly those in *Freedom*. Whether he read Kropotkin's writings or not, and it is probable that he read some of them, is basically of no very great importance. The two men had frequent and friendly personal contacts, and the exchange of ideas will have taken place in the course of their conversations. In truth, the real problem would be to know which of them exerted influence upon the other!

Morris made Kropotkin's acquaintance on 18 March 1886 at a meeting commemorating the Commune. He was at once attracted by the personality of the anarchist prince, and spent a long time with him some days later.<sup>165</sup> It was the beginning of an unbroken and cordial relationship. Kropotkin was invited to publish articles in *Commonweal* and give lectures in Hammersmith. He was even Morris's guest at Kelmscott House.<sup>166</sup> The latter felt Kropotkin's ascendancy so much in the early days that he feared seeing him captured by the Social Democratic Federation.<sup>167</sup> A passing reference, in a letter in December 1886, even inclines me to the opinion that it was under Kropotkin's influence that Morris's anti-parliamentary rigidity hardened, and that he was led to make common cause with the anarchists in the League against the Aveling faction, which, inspired by Engels, was refusing to banish the electoral weapon from the means of struggle.<sup>168</sup> It was probably then that his direct contacts with Marx's old companion ceased, and there began a period of political sectarianism lasting two or three years, the futility and error of which he later recognised.

At first glance this friendship may seem surprising but it is perfectly explicable if one grasps the subtlety of its nuances. We must not overlook the affinity of class and culture which could be established between Morris, from the upper bourgeoisie, and the Russian aristocrat, their shared taste for mediaeval art and the parallel aspects of their political and social development. Apart from these personal factors, Kropotkin's anarchism had personal characteristics which suited their exchanges. It was, in fact, a consistent ideology, far removed from the disconcerting contradictions of Proudhon. It laid no stress upon violence, or direct action, and made no apologia for destruction. It is important to note that Kropotkin never gave the slightest support to the League anarchists who caused Morris so much trouble and who, in the end, expelled him from it,<sup>169</sup> despite the immense indulgence he showed towards them.<sup>170</sup> Nor was it an anarchism founded upon a frantic exaltation of the rights of the individual and a denial of any social contract. All in all, it was a utopism having as its aim a society of human brotherhood from which all government, all State and all authority were strictly excluded. But for a few discrepancies, this utopia presented several characteristics in common with Marx's and Morris's vision of the second stage. The disagreement, which was clearly fundamental, turned upon means and, even more, upon revolutionary chronology.

Morris never made the slightest concession upon these points of disagreement, but it is perfectly understandable that, as his daughter May writes, "the friendship between him and Peter Kropotkin was undisturbed by this difference of outlook".<sup>171</sup> The weakness of the socialist movement at this time, moreover, made major excommunications impossible, apart from the multiplicity of sects. Bernard Shaw describes Morris's attitude with great exactitude when he records that the latter,

"though he would not countenance Anarchism on any terms, was genuinely anxious to discover how its appetite for freedom could be reconciled with the positive side of Communism".<sup>172</sup>

This desire was no less keen in Kropotkin and for his part he had publicly expressed it:

"Whatever our ideas upon the future organisation of society may be, there is one point common to all sincere socialists: the expropriation of capital must come out of the next revolution. So any struggle which prepares for this expropriation must be unanimously supported by all socialist groups, to whatever shade of opinion they belong."<sup>173</sup>

And Kropotkin had no hesitation over close contact even with Hyndman who succumbed equally to his charm and gave him his friendship, even if, in his memoirs, he sheers off and attributes to him opinions which he never expressed.<sup>174</sup>

It is important, in order to understand better the ease with which exchange of ideas between Morris and Kropotkin could develop, to recall that the latter never used any esoteric vocabulary, and introduced the anarchist ideology in terms of socialism or communism. He wanted

"the abolition of personal property, communism, on the one hand; on the other, the abolition of the State, the free Commune, the international union of working peoples".<sup>175</sup>

For Morris, those were long-term rather than immediate ideals and he envisaged, not the abolition, but in the words used by Engels as by himself, the withering away of the State. No doubt he could subscribe, with a different chronological perspective, to the conception of a society founded upon "absolutely independent Communes". Only, for Kropotkin the process was reversed and, according to him, it was the communes "alone which can give us the necessary environment for revolution and the means of accomplishing it".<sup>176</sup> Morris, on the contrary, envisaged the necessity, willy-nilly, of a centralised State throughout the first stage before communist society could be inaugurated. With these fundamental reservations made once and for all, Kropotkin was much nearer to Morris than to many anarchist groups when he federalised the communes into a close network, a "federal society – truly one, truly indivisible, but free and growing in solidarity through its very liberty". Perhaps Morris owed to him the notion of a duality in the federal system, resting upon locality and upon occupation at the same time:

"Each group in the Commune will of necessity be attracted to other similar groups in other Communes; it will form groups and associations with them through links at least as strong as those which attach it to its co-citizens, and will constitute a Community of interests whose members are spread among a thousand towns and villages."<sup>177</sup>

Conversely, it was perhaps under the influence of Morris that, in his memoirs published fourteen years later, he detailed his thought and its formulation, describing "federations of communes among themselves, and federations of communes with trade organizations".<sup>178</sup>



In this new society, where the State apparatus no longer exists, the customs and relationships of men will be completely changed and Morris speaks with the same voice as Kropotkin when the latter writes:

"Three-quarters of all crimes and offences will disappear along with private property . . . Law and punishment are abominations which should cease to exist . . . let us treat as a brother the man who has been driven by passion to do wrong to his fellow." <sup>179</sup>

The competitiveness of the capitalist world will be succeeded by brotherhood: "fellowship," says Morris, "mutual aid," says Kropotkin; and this last expression reminds us of Ruskin's "the first and highest law . . . is 'help' ". Moreover, Kropotkin considers this mutual aid as a law of nature in the same way as the struggle for existence and, like Morris, he rebels against the distortion of Darwinism that Huxley, starting from this last phrase, had made in a publication of 1888. If one were to follow Huxley's reasoning:

"There is no infamy in civilized society, or in the relations of the whites towards the so-called lower races, or of the 'strong' towards the 'weak', which would not have found its excuse in this formula."

For Kropotkin, true Darwinism simultaneously takes into account the struggle for existence and mutual aid, and in nature the latter plays the dominant rôle. <sup>180</sup> From 1890, he published in the *Nineteenth Century Review* a series of articles on mutual aid among animals, savages, barbarians, in the mediaeval city and among us, later to be collected and completed, in 1902, in his book *Mutual Aid*. <sup>181</sup> Kropotkin's reaction to Huxley's theses seems to have preceded Morris's but it is possible that they mutually influenced and strengthened each other's attitudes during their conversations. This also probably happened with their views on the Middle Ages, but Morris's must have been the predominant influence, because Kropotkin's article on mutual aid in mediaeval times was only published in 1894 and refers to sources familiar to Morris (notably Thorold Rogers) to illustrate the superior lot of the worker of earlier days compared with that of the nineteenth-century worker. <sup>182</sup> In general, this article stresses the fact that the towns and guilds of the Middle Ages were the continuation of old village communities and stresses also the spirit of liberty and co-operation which inspired Gothic art. It is true that this last idea was expressed by Kropotkin as early as 1885. <sup>183</sup> There again, it can only be a question of mutual agreement and influence.

In the end this is the impression one receives whenever there is a convergence of opinion apparent between them, whether it is in condemning the theories of Henry George <sup>184</sup> or Fourier's phalansteries, <sup>185</sup> in reducing the working day to four or five hours, <sup>186</sup> in beautifying the places where workers carry on their occupations, <sup>187</sup> in wanting work to be "the free exercise of *all* the faculties of man", <sup>188</sup> in rejecting its subdivision, <sup>189</sup> in inviting painter and poet to enrich their art by the practice of manual work. <sup>190</sup> On these last points, it is, in fact, Morris who influenced Kropotkin, and the latter acknowledged his debt:

"Art, in order to develop, must be bound up with industry by a thousand intermediate degrees, blended, so to say, as Ruskin and the great

Socialist poet Morris have proved so often and so well.”<sup>191</sup>

It is the same when Kropotkin asserts that in the new society needs will be characterised by “a taste for simplicity” and that there will be the means to satisfy them amply “on condition that one knows how to relate the means to the satisfaction of real needs”.<sup>192</sup> If one had to draw up a balance sheet of the influences exerted, it would certainly be found that the debit balance was Kropotkin’s.

What particularly interests us is to observe that, in essentials, Morris was absolutely adamant about the anarchistic ideas of his Russian friend. And the latter, moreover, displayed a gently obstinate refusal to understand what Morris could not have failed to explain to him.<sup>193</sup>

“We cannot hold with the collectivists,” Kropotkin writes, for example, “that payment proportionate to the hours of labour rendered by each would be an ideal arrangement.”<sup>194</sup>

It was not an ideal for Morris either, and he must certainly have attempted to convey that it was simply an aspect of the necessary and transitory phase of the first stage, just like the State socialism which Kropotkin reproached the social democrats, inspired by Marx and Engels, with wishing to institute. In a sufficiently idealistic manner he opposed to scientific socialism, born of Germanic *Geist*, anarchy, born of the Latin spirit.<sup>195</sup> He denied the need for any revolutionary government, that “sad illusion”, and wanted to pass overnight into anarchist society.<sup>196</sup>

“Our first obligation,” he writes, “when the revolution shall have broken the power upholding the present system, will be to realize Communism without delay.”<sup>197</sup>

This stubborn rejection of the Marxist theory of two stages, upon which the whole of Morris’s utopia was based, is the point of absolute cleavage between the two men. “What I aim at,” said Morris to Glasier,

“is Socialism or Communism, not Anarchism. Anarchism and Communism, notwithstanding our friend Kropotkin, are incompatible in principle.”<sup>198</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Marxism*

Carrying on a deaf man's soliloquy beyond the tomb, Kropotkin, immediately following Morris's death, purely and simply appropriated him,<sup>1</sup> and various theorists of anarchism have followed him and done the same.<sup>2</sup> This bare-faced annexation was not confined to the libertarians. The Fabians, whom Morris had opposed equally consistently, were not to be left out. In this respect Shaw performed one of the most hair-raising about-turns of his career. In the essay which serves as introduction to the second volume of May Morris's work, he went so far as to write, on the same page, that everything about the Fabian Society, from the bourgeois atmosphere to the furniture, not to mention the tone of the discussions, "would have driven him mad", that he would have walked out in a towering rage, "damning us all for a parcel of half-baked shortsighted suburban snobs, as ugly in our ideas as in our lives", and, a few lines further on, that after the break-up of the Socialist League he no longer preached revolution and "even said that no doubt Socialism would come in Sydney Webb's way: The Fabian way".<sup>3</sup> Shaw had already asserted, in an obituary notice in 1896, both that "he remained unchanged in his socialism" and that "he practically adopted the views of the Fabian Society as to how the change would come about"! <sup>4</sup> Between these two assertions, which really do push the art of contradiction pretty far, lies a Fabian Tract of 1912, from which we learn that "towards the end of his life he was brought in a chastened spirit to bow his neck to the Fabian yoke."<sup>5</sup> It is to the point to recall here that, on 9 January 1896, a few months before his death, Morris wrote to an American correspondent: "I have *not* changed my mind on Socialism".<sup>6</sup> I may add that the least revolutionary leaders of the Labour Party, particularly Clement Attlee, have frequently claimed him.<sup>7</sup> But there is something even more breath-taking: in 1934, on the occasion of the centenary of Morris's birth, a certain Adam Neil, writing in *Fascist Week*, extolled him as a pioneer of Fascism, of Nordic racism and the corporate state!<sup>8</sup>

But these categorical appropriations are far less harmful to the establishment of the truth than are the negative attitudes, sometimes underhand, sometimes peremptory, adopted by a near totality of critics towards Morris's socialism, and, particularly, his embracing of Marxism. I could never reach the end of building an anthology of judgments passed in this sense in the innumerable books and articles devoted to his work and theories. So I must be excused for citing haphazard a few of the most typical. First, here is that of W. R. Lethaby and R. Steele:

"There was, in fact, nothing modern or scientific about Morris's



socialism . . . he never formulated a scientific scheme of socialism. Indeed, it is doubtful if he can be called a socialist at all . . .”<sup>9</sup>

If one chooses to believe Esther Meynell, “he could not march in step with the socialists of his day” and “his own thinking on the matter is obviously muddled”.<sup>10</sup> According to Nikolaus Pevsner, there is in Morris’s socialism “more of More than of Marx”.<sup>11</sup> Margaret Grennan, so clear in so many other respects, writes “he did not know much about the theory of value and cared even less” and that there is as big a difference between him and Marx as between Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Poverello of Assisi.<sup>12</sup> In the eyes of Clutton-Brock, “he was never a theorist and was not accustomed to think in terms of political economy”.<sup>13</sup> For Max Nordau, he was “devoted to a cloudy socialism composed mainly of pity and love for his fellow-man”.<sup>14</sup> Henry Pelling himself declares that “he did not know much about Marxian economics”,<sup>15</sup> and Victor Dupont considers that “he is not sufficiently intellectualised to examine his conviction in the light of a scientific philosophy of history”.<sup>16</sup> These few scattered quotations suffice. We may deduce that for some, Morris was not the least little bit socialist, for others, his socialism was vague and sentimental, and that the near-totality assert that, if he was familiar with Marxism, he was in disagreement with its doctrines or even incapable of understanding them. We note too that certain biographers and critics do not hesitate to contradict themselves. Compton-Rickett, for example, writes that “few men of imaginative genius have been so indifferent to any form of speculative thought as was Morris”, which does not prevent him informing us, a few pages further on, that “he studied Economics with the same thoroughness as he had given to tapestry weaving, and one of the ablest thinkers in the movement tells me that Morris’s grasp of the subject was complete”.<sup>17</sup> No more realistic estimate appeared before Graham Hough’s study,<sup>18</sup> although it had been preceded in 1934, by R. Page Arnot’s emphatic protest, which still remained unechoed.<sup>19</sup> We had to wait until 1955 for the masterly political biography by the historian E. P. Thompson for the matter to be finally revealed in the light of facts and writings. An important part of the present chapter could not have been written without reference to his work, and I hasten to acknowledge my debt. Those who have read and appreciated it will have to forgive me when they find here much of its data, sometimes scattered and sometimes grouped. I have supplemented it by facts which my own research has revealed, but I am still, in essence, in complete agreement with his argument.

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It is appropriate to consider the reasons for the almost general refusal to recognise in Morris’s socialism any revolutionary character or scientific inspiration. Some are obvious, others more elusive. The first, as I have indicated, is the ignorance of most of the commentators, who have no notion of what Marxism is, or a much simplified and distorted notion. In many cases, this state of fact coincides with personal political views, admitted or unconscious, or even a supposed “apoliticality”, which can produce analogous effects. Frequently these phenomena are accompanied by contemptuous attitudes

towards everything non-literary: many critics are still scholars who judge a writer only upon his talent and have no wish to follow his secular wanderings. William Morris's poetic and artistic genius demanded everyone's admiration. Almost instinctively the beauty of his poems, his tales and his decorative work has been isolated from the more or less "impure" aspects. Even more, this beauty has itself created illusions. The impetuous rhythm of his work, its lyricism, its visionary imagination have built up a purely romantic image difficult to reconcile with the traditional picture of a materialist thinker. It seemed inconceivable that such aesthetic flowering could be rooted in social thinking and action which everything showed to be deep and serious. There was something almost indecent about it.

Let me say, in extenuation of the commentators and interpreters towards whom I show such severity, that this image of Morris has been transmitted to them, almost thrust upon them, by the picture left of him by the three biographers who knew him best, whose direct evidence is most valuable and irreplaceable: Mackail, May Morris and Bruce Glasier; and one should not forget to add Lady Burne-Jones. Her picture is not the same and it is not beside the point to define the subtle difference.

The *Memorials* of Lady Burne-Jones are noteworthy for their calculated reticence. We know that she carefully sorted the letters Morris had sent her and destroyed a great many of them, which leaves room for speculation about the exact nature of their relationship. She shows extreme discretion about Morris's political life and one feels strongly that, despite her feelings of deepest affection, she shared her husband's objections and remained aloof. What interests us about her in the first instance is much less what she wrote (or rather left unwritten) than her hidden hand in the preparation of the biography written by her son-in-law Mackail. He was certainly a man filled with good intentions and one cannot blame him for not sharing the convictions of the man who was the subject of his book. We may remark, however, that the book wallows in an atmosphere of Victorian respectability and surrounds all of Morris's love-life with chaste silence. One feels that on this point he was completely concerned not to upset his mother-in-law and above all not to give away her secrets. And that is not the most serious thing, from the point of view which we must clearly adopt. The important fact is that Mackail, who felt fervent and sincere admiration for Morris, was embarrassed by his revolutionary socialism, and constantly strove to minimise, not only the extent of it, but its very existence. He had no way of avoiding the admission of its existence but in his eyes it was a kind of blemish, or shameful inconsistency, this inexplicable intrusion of a phenomenon foreign to the nature of his hero,

"the patient revenge of the modern or scientific spirit so long fought against, first by his aristocratic, and then by his artistic instincts, when it took hold of him against his will and made him a dogmatic Socialist." <sup>20</sup>

Diligently he strove to reduce as much as possible the hold of Marxism upon Morris, asserting that Thomas More's *Utopia* exerted a much greater influence upon him "than the professedly Socialistic treatises – Marx's *Capital*, Wallace's *Land Nationalisation*, and the like – which he had been rather dispiritedly ploughing through". <sup>21</sup>

In this short passage there is a many-faceted distortion of the truth. We

have, it is true, acknowledged the admiration Morris expressed for Thomas More, but we have also seen that he had a sufficiently clear appreciation of *Utopia* to regard it as a historical document rather than direct inspiration, and that he had accepted isolated details to put them in a new perspective, which is to say, with reservations. On the other hand, Morris never expressed the slightest reservation about his acceptance of Marxism, despite stories whose origin we shall shortly examine. I may add that it is absurd to put a utopia whose arbitrary structure is not contained within any explicit historical causality upon the same plane as *Capital*, which is not a utopia, but a factual analysis of factual economic reality. It is also absurd to put *Capital* upon the same plane as the mediocre book by Wallace, whose conclusions Morris rejected along with those of Henry George. There remains the last point: "the professedly Socialistic treatises . . . which he had been rather dispiritedly ploughing through". Here we cannot speak of absurdity, but of dishonesty. In fact, a few pages away, Mackail quotes, in truncated form, in support of his thesis, a sentence from the famous autobiographical article of 1894:

"I put some conscience into trying to learn the economic side of Socialism, and even tackled Marx, though I must confess that, (whereas I thoroughly enjoyed the historical part of *Capital*), I suffered agonies of the brain over reading the (pure) economics of that (great) work." <sup>22</sup>

If the reader will read first the complete version of the text, ignoring my parentheses, and then read Mackail's truncated version, the biographer's intention, in the face of the reality of Morris's meaning, is in no doubt. Again, in the passage which contains this quotation, Mackail asserts that Morris was a socialist before reading Marx and that he was struggling in this reading to find an *a posteriori* justification for his faith; but this belief, he adds, "while it was not unreasoned, was not the outcome . . . of abstract economic reasoning".

All the interpreters have fastened upon this mangled sentence of Morris's. The dishonesty of Mackail, and of all those who followed in his footsteps, does not stop there: in fact, he separated the sentence from its context. Immediately after referring to his reading of "that great work", Morris wrote:

"Anyhow I read what I could, and will hope that some information stuck to me from my reading".

I shall have ample reason to come back to the substance and also to the manner of this declaration. Let me add, as a measure of the credence to be accorded to Mackail, that he ranks the influence of Marx, in the same way as, earlier, that of Rossetti, among the "disturbing forces" which acted upon Morris.<sup>23</sup> *A propos* Rossetti, let us also note that Mackail complacently contrasts his open-handed generosity to beggars with the attitude of Morris, who was only interested in the poor "as a class"; in which direction, the biographer seems to be asking with a wink, does true socialism lie? <sup>24</sup> Mackail makes no effort to conceal the fact that he deplores the time wasted by Morris in his militant activity, considering that it led to "a more contracted and perhaps less effective life than was consistent with his real nature", and it is with relief that in 1886 he sees him return to poetry in translating the *Odyssey* and "swing back into his own orbit".<sup>25</sup> So we are not surprised that he dwells at length upon certain really minor poetical and novelistic works, while he maintains a



complete silence upon his essential theoretical writings and the whole of the articles published in *Commonweal*. It can be said that, in this way, Mackail set the tone of Morrisian criticism as a whole, and that his authority was only challenged for the first time in 1949 by Bernard Shaw in an article in *The Observer*. Mackail, wrote Shaw,

“regarded his Socialism as a deplorable aberration, and even in my presence was unable to quite conceal his opinion of me as Morris’s most undesirable associate. From his point of view, Morris took to Socialism as Poe took to drink”.<sup>26</sup>

The quotations I have made hardly give the lie to this assessment.

We can say that until 1936, forty years after the death of Morris, the only reliable texts available to commentators were Mackail’s biography, which is remarkable in all other respects, and the twenty-four volumes of the *Complete Works* (C. W.) published by May Morris between 1910 and 1915, with their respective introductions. These *Complete Works* do not contain the most revealing political lectures, nor the *Commonweal* articles. Stress is laid almost exclusively upon poetry, novelistic writing and aesthetic thinking. Why this reticence on the part of May, who was her father’s closest collaborator in his militant activity? A reading of her own commentaries reveals that her theoretical education was much inferior to her father’s. She obviously understood nothing about Marxism. While the physical image of the man is, thanks to her, extremely alive, May tends to endow him with a somewhat mystical sentimentality which only existed in her and which she makes credible by an unjustified use of her father’s self-imposed reticence over religious matters. Perhaps the reason for this selective edition of the works is to be sought also in the influence of Mackail and Lady Burne-Jones (who only died in 1920), in the presence of her mother (who died in 1914) and in her odd and ill-explained dealings with Bernard Shaw. And above all we note that from 1896 (the date of Morris’s death) to 1898 she was a member of the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society;<sup>27</sup> this is the explanation of the distinctly reformist outlook which shows in her own writing. It was only in 1936 that she finally published the two supplementary volumes containing the substance of Morris’s theoretical thinking and it looks very much as though only the general development of the political situation at that time removed all hesitation: it must be admitted that at the beginning of this century it required a certain courage in English society to admit to being the daughter of a communist. But these two volumes only had a print of 750 copies each. They rapidly became unobtainable until the new American edition in 1966, and the interpreters of Morris are somewhat to be excused for not knowing of them, when their ignorance was not deliberate.

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In seeking the origins of the legend which tries to deny Morris the status of Marxist, I have so far dealt only with partial, veiled or embarrassed attempts which, except in one special instance (Mackail’s truncated quotation), spread the lie by omission, through fear of public opinion or from Victorian hypocrisy, rather than from overt dishonesty. It now remains for me to talk of another

biographer who did not hesitate to bear false witness and whose influence upon criticism is not to be neglected. I refer to J. Bruce Glasier who, in 1921, published, under the title *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, a glib, hagiographic account which, while it is full of precious details, was the first deliberate falsification.

This book was published in 1921, a year before his death. At that time Glasier bore very little resemblance to the ardent revolutionary whom Morris had known and trusted. Even then, as Thompson justly remarks, his enthusiasm had been idealistic and romantic and accompanied by a certain disregard for practical reality which sometimes irritated Morris, as well as by a superior attitude towards the working class, which was at fault for not responding to his propaganda. After the break-up of the Socialist League, he joined the Independent Labour Party, became friendly with Ramsay MacDonald and in the British Labour Movement became an avowed opponent of Marxism.<sup>28</sup> I add to Thompson's information that Glasier finished up as a Theosophist,<sup>29</sup> which is by no means surprising if one considers the smooth deism which saturates his book and from which he would have us believe that Morris was not free. I may add also, that while he was a leading member of the I.L.P. he accepted a paid post as a propagandist for the Fabian Society in 1899;<sup>30</sup> and finally that Lenin, who had dealings with him in the international movement in 1908, commented upon his opportunism and the fact that "he expressed himself very contemptuously about principles, formulas and catechisms".<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising that Glasier, who tries to pass himself off as a close disciple of Morris (as a new Boswell, says Thompson), looks back from the political viewpoint of his last years and implicitly seeks to justify himself through Morris. It is relevant to remark that May Morris agreed to stand surety for this book by means of a laudatory preface, in which she asserts that her father's socialism was "fundamentally ethical".

That is exactly the central theme of Glasier's book, which he stresses in his opening pages:

"He derived his Socialist impulse from no theory or philosophy or reasoning of his intellect, but from his very being." <sup>32</sup>

So we know from the outset where he aims to arrive and what idea will motivate his book. Nevertheless, he is very clumsy when he admits to us that his memory "is one of the poorest so far as it concerns retaining in the ordinary way a recollection of words or phrases". It is, on the other hand, "exceedingly retentive of visual or pictorial impressions", but, he repeats, he is usually obliged "to content myself with giving the barest indication of the conversations". But he claims that, where Morris is concerned, he has been touched with a sort of grace and can reproduce "the conversations . . . word for word". So his memory is subject to "a sort of 'illumination' or 'inspiration' ".<sup>33</sup> Which does not prevent his making an enormous admission in the last pages of his narrative:

"I must warn my readers that in these jottings I am giving rather what express my present impression of some of Morris's observations than what he actually said or meant to convey." <sup>34</sup>

His was indeed a curious inspiration, as we shall be able to judge. The first

surprising incident he recounts, which the critics have reproduced faithfully, is dated December 1884. We are on the eve of the break between Morris and Hyndman which, a few weeks later, led to the split in the Social Democratic Federation and the foundation of the Socialist League. Morris is making a propaganda tour in Scotland, where he discovers proof of Hyndman's treacherous insinuations about Scheu. With the aim of making the peace, he goes to Glasgow and has a long discussion with the militants of the S.D.F., who are tense and divided. At the end of the conversation, Nairne, the branch secretary and a rigid supporter of Hyndman's dogmatic line, takes Morris to task and asks whether he accepts the Marxist theory of value. If one is to believe Glasier, Morris then exclaims:

"I am asked if I believe in Marx's theory of value. To speak quite frankly, I do not know what Marx's theory of value is, and I'm damned if I want to know . . . Truth to say, my friends, I have tried to understand Marx's theory, but political economy is not in my line, and much of it appears to me to be dreary rubbish. But I am, I hope, a Socialist none the less. It is enough political economy for me to know that the idle class is rich and the working class is poor, and that the rich are rich because they rob the poor. That I know because I see it with my eyes. I need no books to convince me of it. And it does not matter a rap, it seems to me, whether the robbery is accomplished by what is termed surplus value, or by means of serfage or open brigandage. The whole system is monstrous and intolerable, and what we Socialists have got to do is to work together for its complete overthrow, and for the establishment in its stead of a system of co-operation where there shall be no masters or slaves, but where everyone will live and work jollily together as neighbours and comrades for the equal good of all. That, in a nutshell, is my political economy and my social democracy."<sup>35</sup>

Let me say frankly that all the last part of this speech is entirely probable. Morris had come to calm tempers and exhort the militants to "work together", setting aside their separate tendencies. It is altogether probable that he was irritated by Nairne's hostile attitude and sectarian dogmatism. But it is unbelievable that he could have expressed himself in such terms about Marx at a time when, as we shall see, he was making a sustained effort to master the theory of Marx's doctrine and to expound it in many articles and lectures. The theory of value and surplus value had been familiar to him for two years and up to the end of his life he never stopped making it the basis of his political teaching. At the most it is possible that he might, with his habitual modesty, have declared that his competence in this field was inadequate and that he had wanted to avoid his listeners being discouraged by the difficulties of theoretical education. For the rest, this anecdote of Glasier's, for which no corroboration has ever been forthcoming, appears as a gross falsification contrary to everything we know about Morris.

But Glasier did not stop there. On 18 October 1890, in an interview given to *Cassell's Sunday Journal*<sup>36</sup> which had attracted some attention, Morris had avowed his debt to Karl Marx and said that the socialist movement could never have attained such strength if Marx had not given it a scientific basis. Glasier claims to have been surprised at this declaration and to have asked



Morris for an explanation. And here is the explanation Morris is supposed to have given him:

"I don't think the *Cassell's Magazine* chap quite put it as I gave it to him . . . but it is quite true that I put some emphasis on Marx – more than I ought to have done, perhaps. The fact is that I have often tried to read the old German Israelite, but have never been able to make head or tail of his algebraics. He is stiffer reading than some of Browning's poetry. But you see most people think I am a Socialist because I am a crazy sort of artist and poet chap, and I mentioned Marx because I wanted to be upsides with them and make them believe that I am really a tremendous Political Economist – which, thank God, I am not! I don't think I ever read a book on Political Economy in my life – barring, if you choose to call it such, Ruskin's *Unto this Last* – and I'll take precious good care that I never will!"<sup>37</sup>

While one could, in the case of the previously quoted declaration, admit the remote possibility of its being a question of real remarks dishonestly twisted, here everything is obviously invention and falsehood. I overlook the alteration of the name of the paper. It is more serious that Glasier locates this conversation "a year or two after" the Glasgow incident, that is, in 1885 or 1886, whereas the interview took place in 1890, at a time when Morris had declared his position without the slightest ambiguity upon many occasions: is so serious a chronological discrepancy due to a simple lapse of memory?

Let us come to the remarks themselves. Is it conceivable that Morris should have denied himself in this fashion before one who claimed to be his most devoted follower? Why, if the journalist had misrepresented his meaning, did Morris not send a letter of correction to the weekly, as he did on other occasions? Is it consistent with Morris's character to try to appear more knowledgeable than he was, when we are constantly being hindered (I shall come back to this point) by his excessive modesty? Can one believe that he spoke of Marx (and it would really have been the only time in his life) in the terms which Glasier reports? Is it possible that he would have lied to the latter over the extent of his reading? As E. P. Thompson justly says: "the questions are unnecessary. It is easier to ask why Glasier would have *liked* Morris to have said these things."<sup>38</sup>

And that is not all. Glasier carries calumny further, and one is astounded that May should have given her backing to his book. He wrote, in fact:

"It is true that occasionally he used distinctly Marxist phrases in his lectures, and so gave the impression that he accepted in the main the Scientific Socialist position. This was notably the case in that most unsatisfactory series of chapters, *Socialism, from the Root up*, which he wrote for *Commonweal* in 1886–88 jointly with Belfort Bax, or rather, which, as he himself said, Bax wrote and he said ditto to. They were afterwards republished in book-form under the title *Socialism: its Growth and Outcome*. But no one who knew him personally, or was familiar with the general body of his writings, could fail to perceive that these Marxist ideas did not really belong to his own sphere of Socialist thought, but were adopted by him because of their almost universal acceptance by his

fellow Socialists, and because he did not feel disposed to bother about doctrines which, whether true or false, hardly interested him.”<sup>39</sup>

Again, the lie is multiple. It is false to say that at this time Marx's ideas were almost universally accepted by Morris's comrades in the struggle, and the fight he had to carry on within his own organisation against very different ideologies is most significant. It is contrary to all we know about him to accuse him of following the crowd, and Glasier goes much further, finishing up by making him a real hypocrite. It is a lie to write that there exists the smallest contradiction between the ideology of the book in question and the whole of Morris's writings after 1883–84. Finally, it is a shameful slander to claim that Morris played no part in writing the book. Not only did he never admit anything of the sort, as Glasier dares to claim, but the preface to the book, initialled by Morris and Bax, ends with these words:

“We have only further to add that the work has been in the true sense of the word a *collaboration*,<sup>40</sup> each sentence having been carefully considered by both authors in common, although now one, now the other, has had more to do with initial suggestions in different portions of the work.”<sup>41</sup>

In earlier chapters I was able to establish that this declaration very precisely reflects the conditions of this collaboration, about which I shall have more to say. For the moment I shall content myself with saying, in the words of Glasier himself, that “no one who was familiar with the general body of his writings” could fail to recognise unmistakably his preoccupations and his style in the very chapter devoted to scientific socialism, illustrated by examples borrowed from Dickens, from mediaeval history and from the art of dyeing.

I would like to conclude this rapid summary of the part played by Glasier in the falsification of the image of Morris by reproducing a very judicious observation of E. P. Thompson's. By dint of attempting to de-intellectualise Morris, by passing over in silence his activity as a militant conscious of his responsibilities and ignoring the seriousness of his thinking, Glasier, who gives a very lively description of the robust impulsiveness of the man in his daily life, manages in the end to give us the impression that he is dealing with a generous and eccentric buffoon, and that too has its part in the legend handed down by tradition.<sup>42</sup>

I repeat (and I make a point of doing so that there shall be no misunderstanding about my intentions) that the good faith of the innumerable interpreters has been led astray by these successive distortions, which they found in varying degree in the only direct evidence at their disposal. Their failing has lain in reproducing them without the smallest critical discretion, in complacent ignorance of the works themselves and lacking an understanding of their sources.

However, we cannot indiscriminately grant them a general absolution, because Glasier the twister found at least one among them to emulate him, and I must refer to him because his book enjoyed wide publicity. In 1940 there appeared in New York, under the signature of Lloyd Wendell Eshleman, a book entitled: *A Victorian Rebel: the Life of William Morris*. The same book, slightly revised, was republished in London in 1949 under the title: *William*

*Morris: Prophet of England's New Order* and under the signature of Lloyd Eric Grey. The author had written to S. Cockerell, probably asking for information or permission. Cockerell sent the letter on to Mackail, who returned it with a covering letter in which he wrote: "Its ambiguity, not to say insincerity, does not give a favourable opinion of him or of his forthcoming 'Life'." <sup>43</sup> The cautious Mackail's apprehension was well-founded, if only on account of the off-hand way in which the author commented upon his work in the bibliography.

Yet it was to Mackail's authority that Lloyd Eric Grey legitimately appealed when he wrote:

"Morris's means, unlike those advocated or employed by Karl Marx and the advocates of *Scientific Socialism*, were not evolved as the result of economic formulae, nor were they, as Doctor Mackail has pointed out, the result of economic reasoning." <sup>44</sup>

We have seen, too, whence he might have got the idea that Morris "studied Marx with great labour, difficulty and lack of sympathy". <sup>45</sup> But Mackail did not go far enough for his liking, and Bruce Glasier's absurd calumnies no doubt satisfied him more. He quotes a letter written to him in 1936 by a certain Cosmo Rowe (of whom I have been unable to find a trace anywhere) who is said to have known Morris well in the 'nineties and who relates that, whenever the poet was told he should read Marx he invariably replied: "Why should I read Marx? I can see the evils of society without going to him." <sup>46</sup> It is difficult to decide which there is more of, lies or contradictions. It goes without saying that, for L. E. Grey, Morris's writings "do not suggest many Marxian ideas". <sup>47</sup> This ineffable American of the cold-war era asserts that Morris had "a strong aversion to all Eastern influences" and a "preference for Western, or European culture"; <sup>48</sup> in other words, "Morris's ideas were innately English" while "Hyndman, on the other hand, wanted Marxism". <sup>49</sup> One cannot help recalling the famous "Kommunist pas français" uttered by one of Hitler's officers commanding a firing squad at Châteaubriant, and one is left a little bemused when L. E. Grey seeks for Morris a spiritual forefather in Kant, whose influence, even if not Marxist, stems from the same eastern country, and whom Morris could scarcely have known other than by name. But was Morris even a socialist? No, replies Grey, that is pure legend; "he has been made to appear as a man who was in active and violent revolt against the capitalistic government"; such ideas "are not true", and "Morris was a Socialist only in the etymological sense of believing that man must become a social animal". <sup>50</sup> Grey does not hesitate to write that "class struggle was abhorrent to Morris". <sup>51</sup> Is there any need to say that all these assertions are unaccompanied by any reference? The scarcity of quotations in the book is, in fact, striking.

However there are some, and one of them is worth re-quoting. So far I have only picked out untruthful insinuations and baseless assertions. They are hardly original and would not have been worth our attention if Lloyd Eric Grey had not distinguished himself by a genuine prowess which Bruce Glasier himself would not have dared to attempt. Here is what he managed to write:

"Morris believed that all historic progress and decay can be inter-



preted in terms of the interplay between art and society, artistic causes and effects taking precedence over all others.

It is this philosophy of historic change which caused Morris to disagree at heart with the 'economics' and 'historical materialism' of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (just as a similar philosophy caused Benedetto Croce to disagree many years later) and to write to the members of the Marxian Social Democratic Federation that any one who believes that 'knife and fork' economics takes precedence over 'art and cultivation . . . does not understand what art means'." <sup>52</sup>

On 16 June 1894, Morris had written, in the celebrated autobiographical article from which I have quoted several times, and which was published in *Justice*:

"Surely any one who professes to think that the question of art and cultivation must go before that of the knife and fork (and there are some who do propose that) does not understand what art means or how its roots must have a soil of thriving and unanxious life." <sup>53</sup>

I do not personally know of any example of falsification so impudent as that of Lloyd Eric Grey. It is the latest in date and marks the climax of a long legend. Since the publication of E. P. Thompson's book in 1955, <sup>54</sup> there are certain things one no longer dares say, although the temptation remains strong and sometimes ill-repressed. <sup>55</sup> I ask you to believe that it was necessary to recall these matters in order to appreciate the need for a serious study of the facts. That is the sole justification for this preamble, which is as nauseating as it is long.

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If we are to assess the exact extent of Morris's knowledge of the works of Marx, two preliminary remarks are essential. The first is of a psychological nature. Morris, who at first glance seems so straightforward, so much of a piece, so spontaneous, does not reveal himself so easily. This characteristic, which one observers in connection with his love life, affected his intellectual life also. Scawen Blunt remarked that "of poetry he affected to have little knowledge, and of the work of those he was averse to he would pretend never to have read a word", <sup>56</sup> In conversation, he always moved forward cautiously.

"You never knew how much Morris had up his sleeve," wrote Shaw, "until he thought you knew enough to understand him." <sup>57</sup>

He notes elsewhere that

"there was a certain intellectual roguery about him of which his intimate friends were very well aware; so that if a subject was thrust on him, the aggressor was sure to be ridiculously taken in if he did not calculate on Morris's knowing much more about it than he pretended to." <sup>58</sup>

He had a horror of showing-off and when he was speaking of himself he practised the British art of understatement to the limit. We must not allow ourselves to be taken in.

On quite a different plane of ideas, it is necessary to recall how vast was the ignorance of Marxism in the England of the 'eighties. The word itself was not yet current and E. D. Le Mire has established, by a careful reading of successive issues of the year 1884 of the weekly *Justice*, then the only English Marxist publication, that it was not used in it on a single occasion.<sup>59</sup> Marx's death, in 1883, would have escaped the notice of *The Times* if its Paris correspondent had not sent a paragraph recalling his European reputation.<sup>60</sup> The first English edition of *Capital*, in the translation of S. Moore and E. Aveling, only appeared in 1887, and sold 500 copies, half of them in the United States; in the course of a year, from July 1887, only 65 copies went. The author's royalties paid to Marx's daughters were derisory.<sup>61</sup> *The Communist Manifesto* had appeared in English in 1886, as had *Wage-Labour and Capital*, and there was no translation of Engels's pamphlet, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* before 1892. Only *The Civil War in France* had been published in England as early as 1871.

Pease, in his *History of the Fabian Society*, gives a picture of the atmosphere of indifference towards Marxism during these years in words which are somewhat spiteful but not at all exaggerated.<sup>62</sup> Even in the privileged circle of the Democratic Federation, knowledge of Marxism seems, if one is to believe Bernard Shaw, to have been limited. At one of the meetings of the D. F., he writes, "I was told that I knew nothing because I had not read Karl Marx. I read Karl Marx and then found that none of the rest had."<sup>63</sup> The detail is too juicy not to have been contrived, but Shaw was only exaggerating slightly.

Morris joined the D.F. on 13 January 1883. He was to write later that, until then, he had never heard of Karl Marx.<sup>64</sup> Very probably upon Hyndman's advice, he almost immediately embarked upon reading *Capital* in the Lachâtre French edition (1872-75) and we know from May Morris that he "read French easily".<sup>65</sup> He read the book, she writes, "with determination"<sup>66</sup> and "with what unrest of spirit his family well remember".<sup>67</sup> Mackail quotes extracts from a private diary (which Philip Henderson attributes to Cornell Price,<sup>68</sup> and the supposition is plausible) in which Morris is described as "bubbling over with Karl Marx", under the date of 22 February 1883,<sup>69</sup> which, we note in passing, contradicts his own statements. From that moment, references to *Capital* and, even more, borrowings from it, become increasingly frequent in his work, as we shall see.<sup>70</sup> Like various other socialists in these early years, Pease and Shaw for instance,<sup>71</sup> Morris still only knew the French edition. In November 1886 we find in *Commonweal* an advertisement for the English edition "under the editorship of Mr. F. Engels",<sup>72</sup> and it is certain that Morris reread *Capital* in English in 1887.<sup>73</sup> We find both editions mentioned in the catalogue of the sale of Morris's library at Sotheby's in 1898.

*The Communist Manifesto* does not appear to have been published in England before 1886, but there were American editions dating from before 1883. It is possible that Morris may have known one of them and altogether probable that he had access to Laura Lafargue's French translation published in August 1885 in the first issue of *Le Socialiste*.

However, in 1884, in a pamphlet published jointly by Morris and Hyndman, *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism*, there is mention of 'the famous *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels which first formulated in a distinct shape the great truth of the inevitable struggle of classes so long as classes exist'.<sup>74</sup> We

find a quotation from it in the Manifesto of the Socialist League,<sup>75</sup> and May Morris, *à propos* the formation of the S.L., indicates that the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels "was among the 'documents' of our Socialist history".<sup>76</sup> The whole of Morris's work is studded with ideas borrowed from this document. Reviewing a book by Kempner: *Common-sense Socialism*, in 1887, he congratulates the author on having used the word communism "in the sense that it is used in the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels of 1847".<sup>77</sup> Finally, in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, which re-issued articles published by Bax and Morris in *Commonweal* in 1887, reference is made to the *Manifesto* as being "the first appearance in politics of modern or scientific Socialism", and the first manifestation of "practical unity of aim between the theorist and the agitator for immediate gains".<sup>78</sup>

The same is true of *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, by Engels, which is quoted at length, from the French edition of 1880 by Paul Lafargue.<sup>79</sup> We saw earlier that it was from this pamphlet that Morris borrowed the integration into Marxism of Saint-Simon's predictions and the idea of the administration of things replacing the government of people. We saw also, *à propos* Babeuf, that he had probably read it in 1885.

In 1887 there appeared in the United States the first English-language edition of *The Position of the Working Class in Britain*. Engels informed his translator, Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky, that he had sent a copy to Morris<sup>80</sup> and two months later he confirmed to her that he had sent it to him "personally".<sup>81</sup> This gesture was certainly appreciated, because in December 1887 there appeared in *Commonweal* the first of what was to have been a series by H. A. Barker upon the facts brought out by Engels's book. In fact only the first article appeared.<sup>82</sup>

As far as the other works of Marx and Engels are concerned we are reduced to conjecture. *Wage-Labour and Capital* had been translated in 1886 by Joynes, whom Morris knew very well, which implies a weak presumption. In the theoretical handbook reference is made to *The Poverty of Philosophy*,<sup>83</sup> but the little interest that Morris showed in Proudhon leads me to suppose that Bax was responsible for this reference. The same applies to other works referred to there: *The Holy Family*, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* and *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. However, given the very close collaboration which existed for years between the two men, it is not out of the question for Bax to have acquainted Morris with their contents, as well as those of *Anti-Dühring* and *Ludwig Feuerbach*. *The Civil War in France* is not mentioned anywhere, but there is good reason to believe that Morris read this book, not only on account of his enthusiasm for the work of the Commune but still more because the idea that it is necessary to smash the State apparatus is found in his writings.

Engels's *Origin of the Family* poses a more delicate problem. The first German edition was in 1884. There was an Italian translation in 1885, but it is doubtful whether Morris knew of it (we do not even know whether he knew any Italian), and the first French translation only appeared in 1893. He was not very well informed about Engels's theories in 1886, since he was still confusing clan and family.<sup>84</sup> However, Hyndman had, two years earlier, reviewed the work, in somewhat disdainful terms, moreover, since he saw in it nothing but "an abstract of Morgan's work".<sup>85</sup> Whatever the facts then, it is clear that from 1888 Morris had a very accurate knowledge of these theories, which shows



successively in *The House of the Wolfings*, (1888), *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889) and in the articles he published in *Commonweal* under the title of *The Development of Modern Society* (1890): as we shall see, there can be no possible doubt on the subject.<sup>86</sup> May Morris indicates that this period of barbarism exercised a real fascination over her father and that he "read with critical enjoyment the more important modern studies of it as they came out":<sup>87</sup> unfortunately, she quotes no titles. I am reduced to observing that the novel about the Wolfings is a paraphrase of Chapter VII of *The Origin of the Family*, that the next novel is full of echoes of Chapter IX and that the articles in *Commonweal* faithfully reproduce Engels's ideas about gentile society. The least that one can suppose is that Bax translated whole passages of the book to Morris.

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One question comes to mind: did Morris understand German? No, he wrote, "Goethe and Heine I cannot read since I don't know German".<sup>88</sup> He explained to the reporter of *Cassell's Sunday Journal*, in the course of that interview which aroused Bruce Glasier's venom, that, if he read *Capital* in French it was because "unfortunately I don't read German".<sup>89</sup> In the course of a friendly gathering at home, in 1883, he chatted with a certain Dr. Bock, who had a specialised knowledge of old traditions in weaving, and who did not know English: "I had to talk English-French against his German-French".<sup>90</sup> In August 1884, relations began to deteriorate between him and Hyndman, who had greatly helped his political education, and he wrote to his Austrian friend Andreas Scheu:

"I feel myself weak as to the Science of Socialism on many points; I wish I knew German, as I see I must certainly learn it . . . By the way, as to the German, do you know any Socialist who knows English who would read with me, say in about a month from now to begin with; it might be convenient to someone." <sup>91</sup>

It would be interesting to know whether this suggestion led to any arrangement. It could, clearly, have been an oblique appeal to Scheu himself, since the latter had settled in Edinburgh a month earlier. In any case, Morris was aware of a serious gap, and it would be astonishing if he made no attempt to fill it.

He certainly would have had no great difficulty in doing so, because the structure of Germanic dialects was familiar to him. In 1869 he had learned Icelandic with Magnusson and, on his own showing, he was capable of reading<sup>92</sup> it and speaking it fluently.<sup>93</sup> He appears to have had more difficulty (but he was twenty-three years older) in familiarising himself with Anglo-Saxon when he prepared his translation of *Beowulf*, but he took lessons from a specialist, A. J. Wyatt, and seems to have made rapid progress; in 1893 he felt himself able "to appreciate the language".<sup>94</sup> As for German proper, in 1886 he declared, somewhat oddly, he could "only read even old German with great difficulty"<sup>95</sup> and Bernard Shaw relates that "he could read Martin Luther's Bible, but no later German".<sup>96</sup> Other facts incline me not to pay too much attention to his professions of ignorance. In September 1881 he appeared to be perfectly *au courant* with the contents of a provocative article by the anarchist

Most in the publication *Freiheit*.<sup>97</sup> In March 1884, Kautsky wrote to Engels that he learned that "Morris is furious with my article in the *Frankfurter [Zeitung]* because I described him as a sentimental socialist".<sup>98</sup> We may note, in this connection, that a book of Kautsky's *Die Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus*, in German, figured in Morris's library. Finally, let us say that his daughter May knew the language very well, and used to write to Andreas Scheu in German.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps he had in her a source of help which has not been suspected until now.

From all these facts, it seems that one may conclude that he was not capable of reading original texts effectively, and that he had recourse to intermediaries for those of which no French or English translation was available. But it is not outside possibility for him to have been capable of reading some given passage once the gist of it had been explained to him and I am inclined to suppose that such must have been the case at least as far as *The Origin of the Family* was concerned.

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If one is prepared to set aside the interested, contradictory and improbable insinuations of Bruce Glasier, which are uncorroborated by any other evidence, one is struck by the constant admiration expressed for Karl Marx in Morris's writings. I have already quoted the autobiographical article: "How I Became a Socialist" (1894), in which he relates his first contact with *Capital*, "that great work", and this is the expression he most often uses when he refers to it. I have also quoted the interview given to *Cassell's Sunday Journal* (1890), in which the fact is stressed that Marx, by giving socialism a scientific basis, opened the way for it to extend its power. The dates of these two declarations are sufficient to show that, contrary to the accumulation of legends, Morris never changed his attitude and that, to the end of his days, he was, in Bernard Shaw's phrase "on the side of Karl Marx *contra mundum*".<sup>100</sup>

The upsurge of enthusiasm produced by his discovery of *Capital* in 1883 lasted a long time. On 16 March 1884, he took part in the ceremony marking the first anniversary of the death of Marx and wrote to his wife that he "performed a religious function . . . to do honour to the memory of Karl Marx and the Commune".<sup>101</sup> One can feel that he was obsessed by the thoughts which these readings provoked and by the need to pass them on. On 1st July, at the seventh annual meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings, he obviously could contain himself no longer and said to his probably somewhat astonished listeners:

The exigencies of my own work have driven me to dig pretty deeply into the strata of the eighteenth-century workshop system, and I could clearly see how very different it is from the factory system of today, with which it is commonly confounded; therefore it was with a ready sympathy that I read the full explanations of the change and its tendencies in the writings of a man, I will say a great man, whom, I suppose, I ought not to name in this company, and who cleared my mind on several points (also unmentionable here) relating to this subject of labour and its products."<sup>102</sup>

This allusion to the fourth section of the first volume of *Capital* shows the extent to which Morris had been captivated by the Marxist analysis of the division of labour in its evolution.

His special interest in this analysis continued to appear for a long time and in 1888, during another lecture, he again referred to "the admirable account of the different epochs of production given in Karl Marx' great work entitled *Capital*", and excused himself for briefly repeating "what, chiefly owing to Marx, has become a commonplace of Socialism".<sup>103</sup> It is even apparent that he must have again reread these chapters of *Capital*, because, two years later, in 1890, he referred to it in order to criticise the inadequacies of the study of this problem made by Sidney Webb in *Fabian Essays*.

"Mr. Sidney Webb has ignored the transition period of industry which began in the sixteenth century with the break up of the Middle Ages, and the shoving out of the people from the land. This transition is treated of by Karl Marx with great care and precision under the name of the "Manufacturing Period" . . . and some mention of it ought to have been included in Mr. Sidney Webb's 'history'." <sup>104</sup>

But his admiration was not restricted to the treatment of a particular question; it extended to the whole of the doctrine:

"To Germany we owe the school of economists, at whose head stands Karl Marx, who have made modern Socialism what it is."

He contrasts the utopian socialism of the previous epoch, based upon mutual consent and consisting of "more or less artificial" ideal societies, constructed within capitalist society, with the scientific socialism of the new school, its historical conception of the laws of evolution and its demonstration of the inevitability of an entirely new system.<sup>105</sup> Not only does he proclaim his support for Marxism, but he effectively protests against attacks directed against Marx's works, as is evidenced by a strange unpublished letter from Annie Besant, who was persuaded by Morris to eliminate accusations of prolixity and pedantry from a reprint of her articles.<sup>106</sup> Finally, it was in this same year 1886 that he started with Bax the series of *Commonweal* articles collected together in 1893 as *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, which provides an interpretation of the theories of Marx, "the author of the most thorough criticism of the capitalistic system of production". In Chapter XIX there is to be found a long analysis of the first volume of *Capital*, that "epoch-making work".<sup>107</sup>

With Morris there was no question of passive admiration, but of study pursued over the years, a long accumulation that was, in the beginning, extremely difficult. Such difficulty was very understandable in the case of a man completely without any theoretical education before the 'eighties and who had lived only for poetry and art. The difficulty was the greater because Marx's theories overturned all the economic conceptions current at the time, which formed the basis for the social mythology of the Victorian era. The difficulty was, moreover, purposely exaggerated by the opponents of Marxism in order to discourage attempts at first-hand reading of the works, and one can say that this deliberate exaggeration is a practice still assiduously maintained today. In 1889, a reporter of the periodical *To-Day*, giving an account of a lecture of



Morris's entitled *How Shall We Live Then?*<sup>2</sup> put this sentence into Morris's mouth: "You may imagine," said Mr. Morris, "what my sensations were on taking my first plunge into Karl Marx's *Capital*, and the audience, with lively recollections of mathematical formulae, laughed and cheered sympathetically."<sup>108</sup> One may wonder how many of the audience, including the journalist, had themselves read *Capital*. But the question need not be asked, for the simple reason that, once again, we are in the presence of sheer invention. In Amsterdam, I had the good luck to discover the text of that lecture, thought to have been lost, and I affirm that at no point did Morris utter any such phrase. On the contrary, what he did say is not without interest. In fact, he asks the question what can attract people to socialism "at the present stage of the movement":

"Is it intellectual conviction deduced from the study of philosophy or from that of politics or economics in the abstract? I suppose there are many people who think that this has been the means of their conversion; but on reflection they will surely find that this was only its second stage."

The first, he continues, is necessarily effective and leads to an understanding of the suffering that exists in the world, either because one is oneself a victim and sees that it is not accidental but connected with a mass of facts, or because one is an involuntary accomplice of the system and is incited to rebel through better feelings. Such, said Morris, had been his own case, when he came to the conclusion that his artistic work could not be accomplished in present society.

"So that I became a Communist before I knew anything about the history of Socialism or its immediate aims. And I had to set to work to read books decidedly distasteful to me, and to do work which I thought myself quite unfit for."<sup>109</sup>

While the normal human starting point, "for anyone who is not a mere ill-conditioned blackguard" (*Morris's spelling*), he goes on, is indignation in the face of injustice, this sentimental revolt is not enough, and theoretical education, however forbidding and difficult it may be, becomes a duty. Morris did not fail to undertake it, despite all the difficulties which, on his own admission, he encountered, and of which the critics have made a careful display. The comments of his daughter May give us interesting details of his effort. Obviously, she writes, the simplicity of the systems of Thomas More and Owen held something much more attractive to him. That is why

"you will understand how a man with his leanings to these simplicities found it difficult to delve with sustained enthusiasm into the intricacies of the 'scientific socialism' of Marx, with its highly technical arguments and economic formulas for students".

She describes for us his reading of *Capital* in 1883, and the "anguish" with which he tackled "the non-historical and technical part of the great work". The following year, she adds, "in the midst of the ever-increasing work of lecturing and peace-making, he still sought time to study theories of work and wages."<sup>110</sup> So, on May's own showing and contrary to the legend, Morris did not content himself with assimilating the historical part of *Capital*. Moreover, even a superficial reading of his writings should suffice to convince us of that. It

is strange that the internal evidence of the works should not be recognised as proof enough where Morris is concerned and that we should be asked with suspicious severity to furnish material proof. That need be no obstacle: it exists!

The *William Morris Gallery* in Walthamstow possesses in its collection a two-page manuscript, in writing very recognisably that of Morris,<sup>111</sup> upon which he had made reading notes upon Chapter XIV, section V, of the first book of *Capital* (*Division of Labour and Manufacture*). For my part, I think that there must exist, or have existed, other sheets. The museum, housed in the building where Morris spent his childhood, was only formed in 1950. But in 1934, in his very interesting pamphlet, R. Page Arnot mentioned that "among the papers of the late J. L. Mahon (one-time secretary of the Socialist League) there is a manuscript in the handwriting of Morris, being a short précis of one of the 'economic portions' of *Capital*".<sup>112</sup> This description hardly fits the two pages I examined in Walthamstow. From correspondence I have had with R. Page Arnot, E. P. Thompson, Andrew Rothstein (director of the Marx Memorial Library) and John Mahon (son of J. L. Mahon) it turns out to be a question of other manuscripts which were probably destroyed in the bombing which devastated the Mahon house during the 1939–45 war. In any case, they did exist.

That is not all. One very definite piece of material evidence, which has never, to my great astonishment, been cited, is to be found in the memoirs of T. J. Cobden-Sanderson. This rather odd character, for whom Morris felt a degree of friendship, opened a bookbinding studio in 1884. The poet was one of his first customers and entrusted him with the binding of his French copy of *Capital*. The job was artistically very satisfactory and was finished on 9 October 1884. On the occasion of the sale of Morris's library in 1898, the book was bought for £52 by another friend, named Bain, who had the happy idea of presenting it to Cobden-Sanderson. The latter was very touched by the gesture, which revived old memories, and he wrote in his diary, on 12 December 1898, after having recalled Morris's pleasure over his workmanship, "I should like to add that the book was his own, and before it came to me had been worn to loose sections by his own constant study of it".<sup>113</sup>

As early as 1883, having his first experiences of militant life and finding himself faced with various concrete problems which each demanded theoretical thought, he felt a growing need to understand "Socialism in detail" and was enraged by being worsted in discussion when he knew he was right, "but of course," he adds, "this only means more study".<sup>114</sup> Despite this "constant study", Morris never felt sure of himself and his modesty was equalled only by his perseverance. In the letter to A. Scheu from which I have already quoted, in which he declared that he felt "weak as to the Science of socialism" and asked for the help of a German comrade, he wrote also "I want statistics terribly".<sup>115</sup> From 25 January to 27 April 1887, he kept a diary of his activities.<sup>116</sup> For several months he had been working with Bax on writing the articles of the series *Socialism from the Root Up*, and they had come to the study of Marx's theories on money, which are rather difficult. Under the date of 15 February, he writes:

"Tuesday to Bax at Croydon where we did our first article on Marx:

or rather he did it: I don't think I should ever make an economist even of the most elementary kind; but I am glad of the opportunity this gives me of hammering some Marx into myself."

Nevertheless, the hand of Morris is discernable at some points of the article, if only in certain examples drawn from mediaeval history. The second entry relative to this work is dated 23 February:

"Yesterday all day long with Bax trying to get our 2nd article on Marx together: a very difficult job. I hope it may be worth the trouble."

Finally, on 3 March, he writes: "Tuesday I spent with Bax doing the next Marx article, which went easier."<sup>117</sup> It is worth noticing this progress in participation and assimilation. I add that, of the twenty-five articles, seven are devoted to a study of the economic theories set out in the first volume of *Capital*.

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In 1887, in the preface of a little book popularising socialism, Morris wrote:

"The more learned socialist literature, like Marx's celebrated book, requires such hard and close study that those who have not approached the subject by a more easy road are not likely to begin on that side, or if they did, would find that something like a guide was necessary to them before they could follow the arguments steadily."<sup>118</sup>

Morris did not have the good luck to have a guide of this kind at his disposal. On the other hand, he did have that of being, successively or simultaneously, in contact with men who helped him appreciably towards achieving an understanding of Marx's writings. The earliest was H. M. Hyndman, who in 1881 founded the first English group of Marxist inspiration, the Democratic Federation which in 1884 became the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.): Morris joined this group in January 1883. Being anxious not to digress from our purpose, I do not mean to review here the career of this socialist who, having quarrelled with Marx, being rejected and opposed by Engels, was nonetheless the first propagandist for Marxism in Great Britain and, despite his personal deviations and his political vacillations, bore witness for Marx for long years before finishing up in the "social chauvinism" denounced by Lenin.<sup>119</sup> I shall content myself here with recalling certain traits of his personality which led to his break with William Morris, the split in the S.D.F. and the foundation of the Socialist League. He was an upper bourgeois, from a family grown rich in colonial dealings, with a public-school and Cambridge education and by profession a stockbroker. He was converted to socialism after reading *Capital* in 1880, but remained, as he used to say himself, a man of his class: he appeared at working-class gatherings and sold his weekly *Justice* in the street clad in an impeccable frock-coat and wearing a top-hat. He was an intriguer and manoeuvrer, given to compromise, but he cannot be accused of having attempted to satisfy personal ambition: of his devotion to socialism, whatever its ups and downs, there can be no question. But it was a socialism intermingled with not very pleasant impurities: xenophobia, chauvinism, colonialism. With him, the revolutionary phrase took turn about with the op-



portunist manoeuvre. He was imbued with his superiority, authoritarian and dogmatic. Understanding on a personal level could not possibly last very long between such an individual and William Morris, particularly after political differences became evident. Their separation was violent and harmful in two respects. It brought schism and antagonism into the scarcely born socialist movement, and reaction against Hyndman's political opportunism led Morris for several years along a purist and unrealistic path. It is nonetheless a fact that it was to Hyndman that Morris owed his first theoretical education. If the founder of the S.D.F. did have a narrow mechanistic concept of Marxism, he also had a solid knowledge of its basic economic principles and Engels himself, despite his hostility, recognised that he was "among the English who have understood our theory best".<sup>120</sup>

Hyndman was introduced to Karl Marx in July 1880. He was made very welcome and for several months there were frequent and friendly contacts between the two families, filled with long political discussions. Things went sour in 1881, when the Democratic Federation was set up. At the inaugural meeting, attended by liberal bourgeois personalities and representatives of radical clubs, Hyndman distributed a work he had just published, *England for All*, two chapters of which were, in the main, purely and simply transfers of fragments of *Capital* without the slightest reference to the author. Marx was justifiably indignant at this plagiarism, and, even more sharply at the ambiguity of Hyndman's political tactics which, far from creating a working-class party, sought to reconcile Marxist analyses with a purely reformist programme. Thirty years later, Hyndman, when writing his memoirs, blamed Engels for this split, suggesting that he had poisoned the relationship through personal jealousy and had persecuted him with hostility. Bax, who appears to have read the letter of severance sent by Marx to Hyndman on 2 July 1881 (the draft of which letter has been rediscovered by E. Bottigelli), gives a similar version of the facts. Perhaps these psychological motivations should not be altogether excluded. It is certain that Engels showed himself extremely inflexible and systematically hostile towards Hyndman, despite the latter's efforts towards reconciliation,<sup>121</sup> and in rejecting him in this way he undoubtedly drove him into the opportunist camp. However, it would be an indication of bad faith to confine oneself to purely psychological explanations, because Hyndman's errors were serious, and Engels only attacked him on the level of political activity.<sup>122</sup>

From this episode, whose consequences have still not, I believe, been adequately studied, I would, for our purpose, consider two facets. While the tone of the letter sent by Marx to Hyndman was somewhat scornful, it was restrained and does not leave the feeling of an irrevocable separation; moreover, a few months later, on 29 October, Hyndman wrote to Marx informing him of his efforts and of the prospects of the movement.<sup>123</sup> On 15 December, in a letter to Sorge, Marx tells the story of the plagiarism and expresses his low opinion of Hyndman, but adds that "his little book – so far as it pilfers the *Capital* – makes good propaganda".<sup>124</sup> On his side, Hyndman maintained a fervent admiration for Marx throughout his life and in his memoirs published in 1911, he continued to regard him as "the Aristotle of the Nineteenth Century", "the deepest thinker of modern times", "undoubtedly a genius".<sup>125</sup>

Hyndman first met Morris in 1879, and then lost sight of him. The contact

was renewed at the end of 1882 or beginning of 1883,<sup>126</sup> when the poet joined the D.F. and he appears to have conceived a warm friendship for him.<sup>127</sup> This is all the more probable in that Morris, filled with neophytic zeal and very conscious of his theoretical shortcomings, declared himself, according to Bernard Shaw, ready to do anything demanded of him and regarded himself as a disciple: "this modest offer of allegiance . . . Hyndman accepted it at once as his due".<sup>128</sup> However, it would be too much to believe that this passionate devotion on the part of Morris was blind about the man. George Wardle recalls having heard him say at the time:

"I don't like the man, but he is trying to do what I think ought to be done, I feel that everyone who has similar ideas ought to help him." <sup>129</sup>

One gets the same impression from reading his correspondence of this period, when, for example, he writes that he feels obliged to join the ranks of an organisation of which he shared the objectives, and adds:

"nor in doing so should I be much troubled by consideration of who the leaders of such an organization might be, always supposing that one believes them genuine in their support of certain *principles*". <sup>130</sup>

It was only a month later, however, in August 1883, that he began to give free rein to his apprehension:

"Some of the more ardent disciples look upon Hyndman as too opportunist, and there is truth in that; he . . . is inclined to intrigue." <sup>131</sup>

However this may be, our chief interest here is that Hyndman took him under his wing over a long period to give him a political education, for in this same month of August, Morris speaks of his "usual Monday talk at Hyndman's".<sup>132</sup> Eleven years later, in that biographical article to which I have recurrent need to refer, he expresses his gratitude for the help given him in understanding *Capital*.<sup>133</sup> These conversations must have gone on for many months and I have no reason to believe they were interrupted before August 1884, that is, before the moment when Morris began to display open opposition.

In 1884, too, these conversations bore tangible fruit in the form of the publication of a brief treatise, under the joint signatures of Hyndman and Morris, entitled: *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism*. In his memoirs, Hyndman tells how the book was written:

"Our co-operation in *The Summary of the Principles of Socialism*, the draft of which I wrote and we revised together, brought us into even closer contact and it has been an amusement to me sometimes to challenge a reader of it to pick out a passage for which Morris was specially responsible. Almost invariably the two pages are chosen which I wrote in imitation of Morris and which he laughingly refused to touch, though a few other paragraphs he wrote himself." <sup>134</sup>

Experience has shown historians that what Hyndman says should not always be taken at its face value. But no matter. Even if Morris's active participation was as slight as Hyndman complacently claims, it represented for him a solid acquisition of the principles of historical materialism and political

economy. The work places the need for socialism upon the basis of historical development, and is peppered with echoes of the *Manifesto* and *Capital*. It sketches the succession of slavery, serfdom and wage labour, and the class struggle which was the driving force of each change. It repeats the classic analyses of the division of labour, capital accumulation, the reserve army, the labour theory of value, surplus value, the contradiction between the social character of labour and the individual character of appropriation and, finally, crises. It praises the work of the first International, recalling that "Karl Marx was the brains of the movement", and the example of the Commune. It finishes with a programme for the collectivisation of the means of production and exchange.

For Morris, that represented a theoretical apprenticeship of indubitable value. While it is untrue, as has so often been lightly asserted, that he rejoined the ranks of the S.D.F. in his later years, he did become reconciled with Hyndman and again wrote for *Justice*.<sup>135</sup> For numerous reasons of a political nature he was careful to keep his distance, but he was able to assert without reservation that the S.D.F. had been "the first appearance of modern or scientific Socialism in England".

So, from the beginning of his life of militancy, Morris personally observed one of the precepts he laid down for revolutionaries:

"... to learn from books and from living people who are willing, or I will say, *who can be made*, to teach them, in as much detail as possible what are the ends and hopes of Social Revolution." <sup>137</sup>

Hyndman was not the only one of his contemporaries whose help was of benefit. That which Andreas Scheu gave him was not negligible.

He was an Austrian socialist who fled from repression in Vienna, taking refuge in Scotland in 1874 and in London in 1880. Tall, elegant, with a superb black beard and looking, says May Morris, like one of Dürer's warriors,<sup>138</sup> energetic, enthusiastic, a good musician and an excellent speaker, he attracted sympathy and played a very active part in the beginnings of the British socialist movement. Morris and he met during the first months of 1883 through the Democratic Federation<sup>139</sup> and their friendship dates from Whitsun of that year.<sup>140</sup> It rapidly became very close, as is indicated by a letter of 5 September, in which the poet tells him of his youth and upbringing.<sup>141</sup> It is true that, in addition to a common socialist faith, they were linked by a common vocation, since Scheu was involved with artistic furnishing and decoration.

Scheu remained in London until the summer of 1884, and during that period he gave Morris invaluable help by translating many passages of Marx, Engels and Lassalle.<sup>142</sup> His departure for Edinburgh, at the moment of the disagreement with Hyndman, left Morris bereft of any help of this kind, and it was then that the latter wrote him the letter already quoted, asking him to recommend a German comrade capable of undertaking to read Marxist writings with him. We should recall that it was Scheu's political activity in Scotland which incited the ire of Hyndman and led to the split of 1884. In order to defend Scheu against unjustified accusations, Morris came into direct opposition to the leader of the S.D.F. and so prepared the split which led to the birth of the Socialist League. Scheu returned to London in 1886, and their old



friendship was resumed in full. It had, too, some negative aspects. There is no doubt that the Austrian exile, formerly something of an anarchist, strongly encouraged Morris in his anti-parliamentarianism. It was doubtless for this reason that he never became a member of the circle of intimates of Engels, with whom his dealings became more and more infrequent. But in any case we see him assiduously cultivating Morris, and one may suppose that the latter continued, whenever he felt the need, to fall back on his linguistic and theoretical help.

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When the Socialist League was formed in 1885, several of those involved with Morris already possessed a solid Marxist grounding. Foremost among them were Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of the great German thinker, and the man with whom she lived as wife, Edward Aveling. Their irregular union caused scandal and earned them many hypocritical attacks which roused Morris's indignation. From it dates the development of his sober utopian thinking on free union. The couple lived in close intimacy with Engels, who always regarded Marx's daughters as his own children.

Eleanor had a great affection for Morris, whom she called "a fine old chap".<sup>143</sup> With the support of Engels, she ensured for the Socialist League contact with the most important representatives of socialism abroad and she did a regular feature for *Commonweal*: "*Record of the International Movement*", in which she quoted messages and letters from such men as Bebel, Liebknecht, Paul Lafargue, Kautsky, Lavrov, Stepniak and Leo Frankel. The latter welcomed the new organisation "as a disciple of Karl Marx, and an old member of the International Working Men's Association . . . presuming that the Socialist League, as well as its official organ, the *Commonweal*, serves to propagate the true, *i.e.* the Scientific Socialism".<sup>144</sup> One can say that Eleanor Marx played an important part in shaping Morris's internationalist consciousness and helped him to react early against the chauvinism of Hyndman.

It is to the point, in this connection, to note the extent to which Morris and the founders of the Socialist League were haunted by the memory of the First International. On 30 December 1884, only three days after the split, a committee was formed consisting of Eleanor Marx-Aveling, William Morris, Bax, W. J. Clark, with J. L. Mahon as secretary, with the purpose of drawing up a constitution for the new organisation. On 12 January 1885, it presented its report, which ended with these words: "We propose to preface these rules with the Introduction to the Rules of the International drawn up by Karl Marx."<sup>145</sup> This constitution, faithfully reproducing the text, appeared in the first number of *Commonweal* in February, and among the signatories appeared F. Lessner, one of the veterans of the International, a close friend of Engels, and who was to become one of the mainstays of the Morris branch in Hammersmith.<sup>146</sup> The same issue advertised a lecture by Bax on the International, and, eight years later, in their theoretical handbook, Bax and Morris once again extolled the rôle of the International Working Men's Association.<sup>147</sup> Oddly enough the latter still had a branch in Manchester in 1885, and its secretary wrote to the Socialist League: "If Engels approves your action, rest assured that you will have our aid."<sup>148</sup>

As for Edward Aveling, he was a complex personality about whom there would be too much to say.<sup>149</sup> His morality was very questionable, but (what matters to us here) his militant activity, his devotion, and his knowledge of Marxism are worthy of respect. It is to him and Samuel Moore that we owe the 1887 English edition of *Capital*, prepared under the control and guidance of Engels. Up to his leaving the Socialist League, in which he vainly endeavoured to oppose anti-parliamentary sectarianism, he undertook educational functions. In February 1885, he began a series of lectures upon *Capital*, and Morris participated in the opening session.<sup>150</sup> Two years later, writing some "*Notes on Propaganda*" for his personal use, the latter mentions these lectures among the memorable achievements of the League.<sup>151</sup> It is not impossible that he attended the earlier ones since, in a letter which I discovered in Hammersmith, he praises them warmly.<sup>152</sup> From April on, Aveling began to publish in *Commonweal* a series of articles on scientific socialism.<sup>153</sup> Today these articles seem very debatable. Some, particularly the earlier ones, are very good, but as Aveling got further into economic analysis he tended more and more towards mathematical abstruseness, omitting all the specific and historical support which gave Marx's arguments all their weight and vigour. The result is not only a disconcerting dryness but also an impoverished schematism: what Aveling most lacked was an assimilation of dialectics. Some readers were put off; others, on the contrary, read the articles with great interest.<sup>154</sup> We have not much idea of what Morris himself thought, but we may imagine that he derived more satisfaction from the original than from the interpretation. However, Aveling's efforts provided a useful example, and Marxist study groups were set up in the provinces during the following years, notably in Edinburgh and Bolton.<sup>155</sup> His incontestable merit was that of putting theoretical education on the order of the day, and thus creating a favourable atmosphere for the study of works. Morris never had any close personal dealings with him and, consequently, felt an understandable aversion to him that he was not alone in experiencing; but it is not to be denied that contact with Aveling was a very favourable factor in his initiation into Marxist theory.

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The Marxist with whom Morris formed the closest and longest-lasting ties was Ernest Belfort Bax. Philosopher, jurist, musician and excellent German linguist, he was deeply impressed in his youth by the events of the Paris Commune, and because the positivists were the only ones to take up the defence of the Commune against public opinion he turned to that school of thought. He may be said to have borne the mark of it all his life; the ethical preoccupations which are to be found in all his writing have their origins there. In the course of a long stay on the continent, he started studying German philosophy and the various political movements, and in 1879 he discovered *Capital*. In 1881 he published in a monthly magazine, *Modern Thought*, an article on Karl Marx which attracted the latter's attention. Through his daughter Eleanor, Marx expressed his thanks, and, in a letter to Sorge on 15 December, while he regretted the young author's confusion and mistakes, he praised the article:

"Now that is the first English publication of that kind which is per-

vaded by a real enthusiasm for the new ideas themselves and boldly stands up against British philistinism.”<sup>156</sup>

Frau Marx had just died, and he himself, more and more ill, was to go in his turn fifteen months later. So Bax was not able to make his acquaintance, but shortly afterwards he received an invitation from Engels and began a life-long friendship with him.<sup>157</sup>

In his memoirs, published in 1918, Bax who, like Hyndman and so many others, had changed course, paints a picture of Engels which is both admiring and severe, and which tends to minimise his nobility of character and the breadth of his thinking.<sup>158</sup> In so doing he displayed a singular lack of gratitude, because it was to Engels above all that he owed the theoretical education which enabled him to play a fairly important part in the socialist movement during the 'eighties. He was a regular attender at the Sunday evening gatherings which Engels held for his closest circle and for foreign visitors. The copious correspondence which we still have from the old philosopher tells us of Bax's presence with him on many other occasions. Their intimacy must have been very close, because in the Amsterdam Institute I have read letters written to Engels by Bax between 1884 and 1893 containing constant reciprocal invitations: in the beginning they are addressed to “Dear Mr. Engels” and soon to “My dear Engels” or to “My dear General”,<sup>159</sup> this last appellation being hardly used other than by Marx's daughters. I mention in passing that, apart from these few letters, I have never been able to find a trace of Bax's papers, which surely deprives us of a valuable source of information.

It must be admitted that he was a somewhat odd personality: “reasonable on many points . . . quite mad on others”, Eleanor Marx said of him.<sup>160</sup> Before anything else, he was a philosopher devoid of any practical sense. He was heavy, incredibly naive and lacking in all sense of humour. He had persistent bees in his bonnet which would suddenly begin to buzz in the midst of sometimes very penetrating observations: an aggressive misogyny, a hatred of philistinism, of established religions and of the bourgeois family. It must be added that he was a chatterbox and was mistrusted on account of his indiscretions.<sup>161</sup> Engels, who paid tribute to his honesty,<sup>162</sup> but regarded him as a “hunter of philosophical paradoxes”,<sup>163</sup> sketched a picture of him which appears to be a marvellous likeness:

“I have had Bax here for a week and was daily interviewed by him with the regularity of a clock and the inquisitiveness of an American journalist. But it gave me the opportunity of quiet talk with him on many subjects and, when he has done with his set questions (which, as with most people here, are meant to save them study), and has exhausted his sudden flashes of original ideas about the morrow of the revolution, and so on, he begins to talk sense, and more sense than the preliminary conversation led you to expect. Then you find that after all he has a largeness of view that is but too scarce here amongst the sectarians who call themselves Socialists. But as to unacquaintance with the world that is, as to hermit-like simplicity and being a stranger in the midst of the largest town of the world, an English bookworm beats his German compeer hollow.”<sup>164</sup>



This estimation is worthy of our attention, because it conveys very accurately the way in which Bax tackled Marxism and the picture of it he must have transmitted to Morris. In fact, one can observe two complementary attitudes in him.

We should recall, first, that Morris had easily absorbed the "historical part" of *Capital*. He had painfully overcome the economic difficulties with the help of Hyndman, Scheu and, to some extent, Aveling, but these three men were incapable of going any further, which explains their somewhat narrow schematism. It was quite different with Bax, who, in his own writings, seems to be little concerned with the mechanics of capitalist exploitation and to be interested above all in the superstructures. In this way we are led to a curious observation. It is almost exclusively in the works written jointly by Morris and Bax that the latter has anything to say about Marx's economic doctrines. He does so in a remarkable way, under pressure from Morris who could not, therefore, remain a passive partner and learned at the same time as he refreshed what he already knew. So, despite the slanders of Bruce Glasier, their collaboration was particularly close in this area, and one is the more convinced of it when one compares the ease of style of the joint writings with the heavy and sometimes almost unreadable prose of Bax alone. But the latter's attention was centred upon philosophical problems and also upon the development of capitalism on an international scale and so there was, between Engels and Morris, an ideological vehicle whose exceptional importance does not seem to have been appreciated up to the present.

Morris and Bax became acquainted in 1883, during the months of the upsurge of the Democratic Federation, but their friendship does not seem to have started until the autumn of 1884, when the split was developing and they found themselves in the same camp. Their collaboration started on 1 January 1885, the date of their joint drafting of the Manifesto of the Socialist League, which was the Marxist charter of the new organisation,<sup>165</sup> and in the following year it became more considerable with the joint writing of a series of articles *Socialism from the Root Up* which the authors reshaped together in 1893 when they published *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*. During these years, despite a serious disagreement in 1887, we find them continually side by side in the political scene. They were linked by deep affection, and Bax was part of the intimate circle of Kelmscott House. It was very much a family friendship and May Morris amusingly describes the joy Bax could provoke in Morris by his oddities, particularly his misogyny and naive credulity:<sup>166</sup> it was even the cause of puzzlement which, thirty years later, the poor man had still not resolved.<sup>167</sup> Even in his public utterances Morris could not help poking fun at him. So it was that in one of his lectures he referred to the indignation shown by Bax upon seeing monstrous privileges bestowed upon "weak women"<sup>168</sup> and in a theatrical entertainment he even goes so far as to depict him as a dangerous dynamiter.<sup>169</sup> While Bax gave him lessons in Marxism, Morris initiated him into the arcana of architecture and he burst into laughter on hearing his friend "pretend to an independent judgement on the subject".<sup>170</sup>

Despite these sallies, there is no doubt that Morris took Bax very seriously; he quotes his name, before those of Hyndman and Scheu, when in 1894 he expresses his gratitude towards those whose conversation had helped him to overcome the initial difficulties of Marxism,<sup>171</sup> even if he did roar with

laughter, referring to these conversations as sessions of "compulsory Baxination".<sup>172</sup> It is impossible for us to measure the extent of this debt, but, as we saw earlier when speculating about Morris's reading, the references contained in the theoretical handbook of 1893 lead us to suppose that Bax must have acquainted him with the substance of various philosophical works of Marx and Engels. And that went on for at least ten years.

Bax's influence suffered only one eclipse, in 1887, when he refused to follow Morris in his anti-parliamentarianism, remaining faithful to the directives of Engels.<sup>173</sup> It was with lively displeasure and great apprehension that the poet regarded Bax's attendance at the Zurich conference of the German Social Democratic Party. He feared that he would come back with strict orders, and refused to submit to this "pedantic tyranny".<sup>174</sup> That was the only serious disagreement between the two men and it does not appear to have affected their relationship. On the contrary, Morris appears, in general, to have been attentive to Bax's opinion and inclined to follow his advice.<sup>175</sup> One must say that, at times, when he came out of the clouds and put his feet on the ground, Bax was capable of astonishing political intuition. One example, the importance of which is very rightly underlined by E. P. Thompson,<sup>176</sup> appears in an article which he wrote for *Commonweal* in 1888 about the partition of Africa by the colonial powers. After describing the immense resources which this conquest opened up to "modern capitalistic exploitation" in terms of natural resources, cheap labour, outlets for trade and emigration, he considers that, henceforth, the fulcrum of European capitalism will lie there and envisages "the dread possibility . . . of the capitalistic world taking a new lease of life out of the exploitation of Africa". His conclusion is frankly pessimistic: "but it is quite conceivable, to say the least, that the present stage should be prolonged in a slightly changed form even for another century".<sup>177</sup> These apprehensions echo the first hints which we find at the time in the writings of Engels of the birth of imperialism. They fell like a cold shower on the enthusiasm of most socialists, who were convinced that the revolution was at hand. This article made a deep impression upon Morris, and provoked what was for him an unusual reaction: he devoted the editorial of the same issue to the topic. While accepting the accuracy of Bax's analysis, he tried to shield his comrades from discouragement, and justly observed that "the movement towards Socialism . . . is as much part of the essence of the epoch as the necessities of capitalism are". The effort that has to be put into the propagation of socialist ideas, he writes, will not be wasted, "though it may be obscured for a time, even if a new period sets in of prosperity by leaps and bounds".<sup>178</sup> This article had a lasting effect upon Morris's thinking. We should not forget that only a year and a half later the first instalment of *News from Nowhere* appeared in *Commonweal*, and that the date of the "great change" was put off to 1952.

On re-reading Morris's editorial one is struck by the use of such dialectical concepts as progress by leaps and the unity of opposites. Is he not replying to Bax in the language which Bax taught him? Here, in fact, is where one must look for Bax's most vital contribution to Morris's Marxist formation, one that nobody else could provide. The poet was perfectly aware of this legacy, and several references he made in lectures and articles to his friend's teaching deserve some attention. Notice the manner of reasoning in a passage such as this:

"Will the period of machinery evolve itself into a fresh period of machinery more independent of human labour than anything we can conceive of now, or will it develop its contradictory in the shape of a new and improved period of production by handicraft? . . . Is the change from handicraft to machinery good or bad? And the answer to that question is to my mind that, as my friend Belfort Bax has put it, statically it is bad, dynamically it is good. As a condition of life, production by machinery is altogether an evil; as an instrument for forcing on us better conditions of life it has been, and for some time yet will be, indispensable." <sup>179</sup>

There is a whole complex of ideas underlying this formulation: the theory of development, the unity of opposites, the negation of the negation, the dialectical relationship between the productive forces and production relationships. The same kind of thinking is found in other passages:

"Our friend Bax . . . did, I think, really put the matter on its true footing when he pointed out that as a step to something better, civilization was good, but as an achievement it was an evil." <sup>180</sup>

Morris owes to Bax a still more important Marxist idea, which inspires the whole of his utopia, that history repeats itself without repeating itself, that its movement integrates elements of the past and elaborates them on a higher level without there being any retrogression, but on the contrary, "a step upward along the spiral, which, and not a straight line, is, as my friend Bax puts it, the true line of progress". <sup>181</sup> This affirmation was also made as early as 1885, in the Notes, jointly written by Morris and Bax, which accompany the second edition of the Manifesto of the Socialist League. What is really extraordinary is that this great Marxist concept had not at that time ever been published. It is only found for the first time in the *Dialectics of Nature*, which lay unknown among Engels's manuscripts until the publication of the work in 1925. It must, then, have been through Bax that the idea reached Morris. For the moment, I shall not dwell upon the importance of this idea in Morris's utopian thinking, but in due course I shall show that an essential aspect of his thought would be incomprehensible unless he had assimilated it. <sup>182</sup>

One fact at least is strange: it is that this dialectical philosophy, the principles of which he passed on to Morris, is rarely perceptible in Bax's own writings. When it does appear it is in the form of a bizarre and almost mystical jargon. <sup>183</sup> In a general way, except, curiously enough, in joint writing with Morris and in articles intended for *Commonweal*, we find muddled prose and reasoning of very debatable Marxist inspiration. One even stranger fact is that, in his memoirs, he reproaches Marxism with being a purely economic ideology, with being "the reduction of all the changes in the development of human society to economic terms"; and he accuses Engels of having "held to the theory in all its one-sidedness". <sup>184</sup> Is this dishonesty or inexplicable amnesia? Must one wonder whether he was no more than a garrulous, half-understanding vehicle between Engels and Morris? And how would one explain then that under these conditions Morris's assimilation of Marxism should have been much deeper than Bax's? This is a problem to which I should like to suggest an embryonic solution, while awaiting the discovery of



new documents (if they exist) to complete or correct the data I have managed to gather.

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None of William Morris's immediate biographers makes the slightest reference to contact between him and Engels, not Mackail, nor Lady Burne-Jones, nor Bruce Glasier nor his own daughter May. Is this their way of preserving a certain image of the poet? It is possible that, with the first three, this silence comes from relative ignorance, due to Morris's extreme discretion on the subject. In all his correspondence known up to the present, there is only one single definite reference to such contacts. It is to be found in a letter sent to Schen on 28 December 1884, the day after the split in the S.D.F. Now, on that same day, he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones to give her an account of the same events and omitted to mention any meeting with Engels. If he told Schen, it was because the information was needed, and his Austrian friend, himself in touch with Engels, was doubtless aware of the contact. What is striking is that with Georgiana, who was then his confidante in everything, he remained silent. Are there grounds for regarding such conduct on the part of Morris as strange? I do not think so. In 1884 he was a member of the executive committee of the S.D.F., and, if he was meeting Engels, it could only be without the knowledge of Hyndman and in order to organise the opposition secretly. After the foundation of the Socialist League these reasons were less pressing, but habits of secrecy had been formed which neither Morris nor Engels, all in all, wanted to break, the first out of regard for his independence, the second because he did not want to give colour to Hyndman's accusations of direct intervention by the "Marxist clique" and the "Grand Lama of Regent's Park Road" in the affairs of British socialism.<sup>185</sup> This would explain the silence of Lady Burne-Jones and consequently of her son-in-law Mackail. As for Glasier, Morris had no reason to confide in him. On the other hand, May Morris's discretion is more suspect, because she became involved early in all her father's political activity. None of the later critics and interpreters has ever questioned the point and it is only in E. P. Thompson's painstaking book that the name of Engels appears for the first time. However, it is still only a matter of fragmentary and scattered pointers, and the basic problem is not examined as a whole.

The evidence of contemporaries is scarce and contradictory. That of Edward Aveling, in a brief passage from an article devoted to Engels immediately after his death, is particularly disappointing:

"William Morris," he writes, "as far as I remember came once. His mediaevalism Engels regarded with good-humoured toleration."<sup>186</sup>

Is it the same prudent discretion which we see here? It is possible, for Aveling played an important part in events leading up to the split and he could not have been ignorant of the occurrence of various discussions in which he himself participated. Could there be some obscure link between this reserve and the cash debts which the none too scrupulous Aveling owed to Morris? I could not say. However, the general tone of the article suggests another explanation, and the assertion becomes more plausible if we take it that Aveling is here referring to Engels's famous Sunday evening gatherings. There would be then no con-

tradition between his evidence and the more precise version of Ed. Bernstein:

"William Morris, the distinguished poet and artist, and the leader of the Socialist League, which in 1884 seceded from the Socialist Federation, was, up to the time of this schism, an occasional visitor in Engels' house, and Engels always spoke of him with respect, but they never became intimate. The principal reason was this, that Morris was the central star of a circle of his own. Moreover he could only with difficulty get away on Sunday evenings." <sup>187</sup>

In fact, no Sunday evening went by without a gathering at KélmScott House, under the chairmanship or with the participation of Morris, unless he was away on a propaganda tour. Finally, let us look at a very interesting piece of evidence. George Wardle, who was one of the artist's closest associates in the Firm, wrote in 1898:

"Of Karl Marx all he knew at first he must have got from Aveling, I think, but perhaps also from Engels, with whom I think he had some interviews." <sup>188</sup>

What gives Wardle's evidence incontestable value is that he managed the Firm during the years when the interviews must have taken place, and at that time he was in daily contact with Morris. But rather than rely upon third parties, it is of interest to see what the protagonists themselves have written.

The first mention of the name of Morris in the correspondence of Engels goes back to February 1884. He knew him indirectly through Bax and the Avelings, and, in expressing a harsh opinion of *Justice*, the organ of the D.F., he had nothing but disparaging remarks to make about the contributors to the weekly. For the poet his severity was somewhat lessened: "Morris is all very well as far as he goes, but it is not very far". <sup>189</sup> The following month, Engels's attitude was still as distant and disdainful. Kautsky was worried that Morris might be furious at being described as a sentimental socialist. Engels, enveloping all the contributors to *Justice* in the same disdain, replied to him: "The Morris affair is of no importance, these people have thoroughly muddled minds." <sup>190</sup> His reservations were to soften all the same, from the moment when Eleanor Marx reported to him, as she did to her sister Laura, that in the council of the S.D.F. Morris had defended the actions of Paul Lafargue against the underhand opposition of Hyndman. ("Morris . . . also spoke for us") and that he had been to Highgate Cemetery with her for the first anniversary of Marx's death. <sup>191</sup> Eleanor felt more and more admiration for the poet and, following a lecture he gave in April to open an exhibition of painting in Whitechapel, she gave an enthusiastic account of his "splendid speech". <sup>192</sup> But Engels remained distrustful of the "very rich art enthusiast but untalented politician, Morris", <sup>193</sup> because he observed that Hyndman made use of his own money and of the poet's in order "to buy every socialist movement". <sup>194</sup> The same aloofness was maintained until October, because he declared that he had confidence only in Bax and Aveling, and "a very poor opinion" of the rest. <sup>195</sup>

Between 20 October and 8 November 1884 Morris made the acquaintance of Engels, because on the later date the latter wrote to Kautsky:

"At five o'clock Aveling and Tussy<sup>196</sup> are coming, and at 7 o'clock Morris wants to have a long conference with me." <sup>197</sup>

It was not easy to gain admittance to Engels and we may suppose that this meeting was not the first. It was quickly followed by others. On 23 November, in fact, Engels wrote to Laura Lafargue that "Morris . . . was here the other night and quite delighted to find the Old Norse Edda on my table", <sup>198</sup> which suggests a very relaxed atmosphere. But soon these discussions were concerned with the crisis within the S.D.F., which Engels followed very closely, keeping an eye upon its vicissitudes. It was at his suggestion that the opponents of Hyndman ("we, the cabal," wrote Morris)<sup>199</sup> met at Aveling's house on 18 December and wrote to Scheu in Edinburgh to come back to London to attend the next council of the S.D.F. and denounce the lies and slanders of Hyndman. The council met on the 23rd but, because of lack of time, discussion was not completed and only reached its conclusion on the 27th. Hyndman was then left in the minority, and his opponents left the S.D.F., resolved to found a new group, the Socialist League, and a new publication, *Commonweal*.

This decision had been taken a few days earlier during a meeting of the opposition at Engels's house. On 31 December, Eleanor Marx related the events in a letter to her sister Laura, and wrote, in particular:

"Our majority was too small to make it possible for us really to get rid of the Jingo Faction, and so, after due consultation with Engels, we decided to go out and form a new organisation. This is to be called the Socialist League. Bax is anxious that we should issue a weekly paper. But Engels is dead against this, so we shall probably, for the present, content ourselves with a monthly journal." <sup>200</sup>

After this general meeting of the opposition, Engels saw Morris again on 27 December, just before the decisive meeting where the split was to take place. Writing to Bernstein on the 29th, Engels told him about the development of the split, repeating what Morris had said about the proofs he had discovered in Edinburgh of the duplicity of Hyndman, and he added: "Morris and Aveling were at my place before the session, and I was able to give them some further advice". <sup>201</sup> About this meeting we have the evidence of Morris himself (and it is, as I have said, the only document of this kind which we possess). He wrote to Scheu on 28 December:

"Aveling summoned me to go up to Engels on Saturday – important business. I was uncomfortable rather wondering what it was. Aveling told me it was about the *Commonweal*, that Engels thought we should have no chance of carrying on a weekly, and had better try a monthly, at first at any rate. Aveling seemed rather inclined to agree with us and to stick to the weekly. I saw Engels who said we were weak in *political* knowledge and journalistic skill, and that we should find it very difficult to carry on a weekly paper really well without stuffing it with rubbish and so on. I must confess that though I don't intend to give way to Engels, his advice is valuable; and on this point I am inclined to agree . . . I do dread having to drop the weekly, whereas I am sure we could carry on a monthly. I am afraid you will be disappointed at this, and I want to have your opinion . . . I repeat, we are safe with a monthly even if our progress as an



organization be slow: with a weekly it would always be doubtful: let's try the monthly first."<sup>202</sup>

I think, like E. P. Thompson,<sup>203</sup> that the tone in which Morris speaks of Engels ("though I don't intend to give way to Engels") is mainly diplomatic. It was a question of allaying Scheu's disappointment, for he, always rather "leftist", tended to rebel against the authority of Marx's friend. In fact, Morris "gave way" and accepted the reasonable view of Engels against the opinions of Aveling, Bax and Scheu and probably against his own inclination.<sup>204</sup>

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With the split, wrote Morris to Scheu in the same letter, "ancient history" ended and "modern history" began. The decision to leave the S.D.F. when the opposition was in a majority aroused a certain amount of surprise. In February 1885, when Paul Lafargue received the first number of *Commonweal*, he wrote to Engels that "everyone here is very surprised that, having a majority, our friends withdrew instead of turning out the minority".<sup>205</sup> However, Engels had explained to Laura why, after discussion with Morris ("as Morris said to me"), he had come to this decision: the S.D.F. had scarcely more than three hundred members and, as for the provinces, it was all "bosh and bogus",<sup>206</sup> and in his letter of 29 December to Bernstein already quoted, he gave the same argument advanced by Morris.

Engels was full of good will towards the founders of the League, although he expressed doubts about their political capacity. In this same letter to Laura he wrote: "in all England one could not find three men so little fitted for political organisation as Aveling, Bax and Morris; but they are sincere"; and in his letter to Bernstein he uses the same language: "the only honest men among the intellectuals, but also the most unpractical men (two poets and a philosopher) that it is possible to find". What is important for us to notice is that the militants who were closest to Engels then considered Morris, as well as Bax and Aveling, as being members of the Marxist group: "our friends", says Paul Lafargue, and Eleanor Marx, speaking of them, says "our people".<sup>207</sup>

In her letter of 31 December already quoted, Eleanor had already written to her sister Laura:

"The General<sup>208</sup> has promised, now that we are rid of the unclean elements in the Federation, to help us; . . . we shall, of course (through Engels) have the Germans with us, and we also count on the Parti Ouvrier."

As I have mentioned, she took over the direction of the international feature of *Commonweal* and, on behalf of Engels, she approached the continental socialists to ensure their support and to gather their messages of solidarity for publication in the second issue.<sup>209</sup> Morris himself wrote a letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht in his own hand, signed by himself and Aveling, asking him for articles, and telling him he could write them in German, as "we shall have no difficulty in translating" them.<sup>210</sup> On the appearance of the first issue, Eleanor asked J. L. Mahon to put four copies at the disposal of Engels, for him to send to Liebknecht, Bebel, Sorge and Bernstein.<sup>211</sup> Morris was full of plans. With

Bax he prepared a programme of socialist pamphlets, and among the suggestions was one to be written by Engels under the title of *Cheap Goods*.<sup>212</sup> It does not appear that Engels ever wrote it.

However, the latter did give his friends much more spectacular help. The second number of *Commonweal* (March 1885) published his resounding article *England in 1845 and 1885*<sup>213</sup> which provides a remarkable analysis of the development of British capitalism from the period of prosperity after the decline of Chartism to the new period of economic crisis: it was the loss by England of its industrial monopoly which gave socialism new life and prospects. E. P. Thompson justly remarks that, in publishing this article in the journal of the Socialist League, he identified himself with it from that moment,<sup>214</sup> and he also makes the curious comment that, in places, the style of Engels takes on certain of Morris's turns of thought as well as his usage of the word "civilisation".<sup>215</sup> This article made a deep impression on Morris, and he enlarged upon it in a lecture given in July, quoting sentences from this writing of the "great socialist economist F. Engels".<sup>216</sup> In a lecture given at the end of March,<sup>217</sup> one can feel that he is already preoccupied by the problems raised in it. Two years later, in personal notes in which he recapitulates the stages of the movement, he again refers, as a memorable moment, to the "admirable article of F. Engels, which attracted much attention".<sup>218</sup> Contributions from Engels, while not frequent, did continue. In October 1885, *Commonweal* announced that "next month . . . Frederick Engels will contribute an article on the Second Part of Karl Marx' *Das Kapital*".<sup>219</sup> The information was incorrect. The article which appeared in November was purely polemical and denounced an inaccurate pirate translation of *Capital* published by the magazine *Today*.<sup>220</sup>

So, during all the year 1885, relations between Morris and Engels were excellent, and the latter's correspondence does not contain any of the disparaging remarks which he was so prone to make. In fact, one cannot find any reference to Morris. Does that mean that the two men did not meet again? For my part, on the contrary, I think that during this year of close collaboration their meetings were more frequent and that, once the worries over the immediate tactics to pursue at the time of the split were dealt with, their conversations were able to rise to an ideological level which enabled Morris to assimilate certain fundamental aspects of Marxist thought better than through the intermediary of the hazy Bax. The absence of any reference to Morris in the letters of Engels tends to strengthen my belief. In fact, it was rare for him to interfere other than by praising or criticising an action of his interlocutors, and, if he kept silent, it was because these probable visits by Morris were of a routine nature and not concerned with immediate action. Siegfried Büniger, in his thoroughly documented study of Engels, considers it plain that Morris's activities were marked by the effect of discussions he had with him at that time.<sup>221</sup> Unfortunately, he has no tangible proof to support this hypothesis any more than I have. I do not despair of some day seeing appear, through the strange chances of research, some unsuspected document which will provide the necessary confirmation. But is it really indispensable? Apart from the thought-provoking indications which we shall have the opportunity of finding in the work of Morris, would it be believable that these intimate conversations of which we have proof in 1884 should have been abruptly interrupted in 1885, when an improved understanding between the two men was evident?

In November 1885 Paul Lafargue announced to Engels that *Le Socialiste* was going to publish a "gallery of portraits of foreign socialists".<sup>222</sup> This was to continue from 14 November 1885 to 28 August 1886, presenting successively Marx, Engels, Lavrov, Perovskaya, Morris, Bax, Aveling, Basly, Bebel and Liebknecht. As one can see, Morris was regarded by the Marxists as one of their number. But in 1886 things began to go wrong. Engels felt that the working class would not be long in emerging from its apathy, and wanted the Socialist League to come out of its narrow circle and establish a more direct contact with it. In January he was still hopeful and wrote to Sorge:

"Up to now, the whole movement here exists only in appearance; but if a nucleus of men inside the Socialist League can be educated to understand the situation theoretically, it will constitute a great step towards the real mass movement which cannot be long delayed."<sup>223</sup>

A letter not without interest, though one may well wonder just who it is that is to undertake the task of theoretical education! Two months later, Engels was much less optimistic. He considered that "our good Bax and Morris" were "torn by the desire to do something (if they but knew what!)" and that "nevertheless, they have far more truck with the anarchists than is desirable": they were, he concluded, "two political innocents."<sup>224</sup> Morris's anti-parliamentarianism, which was soon to bring him into open conflict with the Avelings, was forcing him, in fact, to rely upon the anarchist wing of the League, without being a part of it. From the month of April, what Engels regarded as collusion, as well as the transformation of *Commonweal* into a weekly, marked the beginning of an estrangement. He became annoyed with "Morris who, like a bull, goes head down against parliamentarianism"; he and Bax "will have to learn by experience what sort of men their anarchists are".<sup>225</sup> He considered that they "are for the moment entirely in their hands" and described Morris as a "sentimental socialist".<sup>226</sup>

We observe that, while Engels never made the mistake of confusing Morris with the anarchists, he did make one, in his anger, by referring to him as a "sentimental socialist", a description which came from his pen on several occasions. There is no doubt that Morris himself was to blame for the opinion, on the one hand through his gross underestimation of his own theoretical abilities and, on the other, through various impetuous declarations which were, purely and simply, an expression of that modesty.<sup>227</sup> All those who knew him more intimately than did Engels agree in saying the opposite. "He was anything but a sentimentalist," wrote Walter Crane, adding:

"There is no greater mistake than to think of William Morris as a sentimentalist, who, having built himself a dream-house of art and poetry, sighs over the turmoil of the world, and calls himself a Socialist because factory chimneys obtrude themselves upon his view."<sup>228</sup>

His son-in-law, Halliday Sparling, asserts that "there was no sentimentality in him, nor could he stand it in others".<sup>229</sup> I could quote many other similar pieces of evidence. Engels's severity is, nevertheless, understandable: he was protecting a definite and effective political line, and Morris's temporary inflexibility rightly seemed unrealistic to him. I feel that it is to the point to add that Engels always showed an impatient and somewhat disdainful severity towards



the English working-class movement. The continuous growth of a middle-class outlook in the British working-class annoyed him, and he contrasted the backwardness of England with the surge forward of German social democracy, of which he thoroughly approved. R. Page Arnot could not help showing some irritation when referring to this excessive harshness.<sup>230</sup> Marx himself was not altogether free of this trait, and laughingly called the English "diese verdammten Schleswig-Holsteiner".<sup>231</sup> However, E. P. Thompson, developing in a later lecture certain judgments made in his monumental work, considers that Marx would have shown greater indulgence than Engels towards Morris and would have better understood the humanist content of his personal contribution to the development of Marxism.<sup>232</sup> I may add that Engels did not share Marx's fervent appreciation of poetry.

However, not all the bridges were destroyed. I think that we can date to 1886 the one letter I have discovered from Morris to Engels. It is only dated April:

"Dear Mr. Engels,

You would do us a great service if you would write us a short article on any subject you please, and as short as you please (if you find that more convenient) for next month's *Commonweal*. I venture to ask this though I know how much your time is taken up and how serious your work is, as it is very important that we should have a weighty article to stand at the head of the paper next month. So I will beg you to forgive me for troubling you.

Yours faithfully  
William Morris"<sup>233</sup>

Engels did not, in fact, find the time to write this "weighty article", but he did, nevertheless, send in a note, with his initials, about the strikes in Decazeville.<sup>234</sup> In November again, there is another note, in reply to a reader's request, refusing permission for any English translation of *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* not made under his direct supervision.<sup>235</sup> That was the last of his contributions to *Commonweal* and one must acknowledge that it was a terse and chilly ending. The fact that in May 1886 he asked Paul Lafargue to send the paper an article on the Paris elections can be attributed to his desire to produce irrefutable arguments against the insinuations of *Justice*, but he did not conceal that "the League is in a complete muddle through their having let the anarchists creep in".<sup>236</sup> In August, he described the state of the League to Bebel in the same terms: Morris was a "victim of the anarchists", Bax was at the stage theoretically of "infantile disorder" and Aveling, having to earn his living, was "not in a position to study much". The latter, added Engels, "is the only one I see regularly", which still leaves room to suppose that he continued to see Bax and Morris from time to time.<sup>237</sup> A supposition which is confirmed by a letter from Engels to Laura in mid-September:

"Had several visits from Bax and one from Morris lately . . . Morris is a settled sentimental Socialist, he would be easily managed if one saw him regularly, a couple of times a week, but who has the time to do it, and if you drop him for a month, he is sure to lose himself again. And is he worth all that trouble, even if one had the time?"<sup>238</sup>

Despite the usual note of disdain, it is clear that there was no fundamental disagreement between them, other than the political question of recourse to parliamentary action, which was then a burning one. On this point Morris remained intractable, though his position was much less cut-and-dried than is generally stated (but that would form the basis of a study in itself, going beyond the bounds of our present enquiry). It is very probable that this visit of Morris to Engels in September 1886 was the last, because in 1887 the crisis within the League became acute and ended in June at the annual conference with the defeat and departure of the "parliamentarians". Letters from Engels to Sorge and to Laura Lafargue express his weariness with socialist "sects" and the interest he felt in the efforts directed by John Burns towards "an independent union of the working men of both societies leaving Hyndman, Morris, Aveling and Co. to fight out their quarrels themselves".<sup>239</sup> Despite the sharpness of this dispute, there is no evidence of any breach between Morris and the militant Marxists. In April he himself translated, published and expressed enthusiastic approval for an article by Paul Lafargue in reply to some somewhat ill-conceived lucubrations on the part of Bax on "the morrow of the revolution".<sup>240</sup> Again, in December, as we have seen, Engels "personally" sent Morris a copy of the American translation of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

It is no less certain that up to 1889, a real separation is perceptible, but it does really seem that it was not entirely a result of the squabbles of political cliques. In 1887, Aveling's reputation fell to its lowest ebb. Endless evidence (too lengthy to be detailed here) shows that his lack of scruples over money matters and women caused him to be ostracised by most militant socialists. Engels, on the other hand, against them all, took up the cudgels on behalf of the companion of Marx's daughter, and did so with a stubbornness, one must say, verging on blindness; his attitude in the matter had unfortunate consequences in turning away from the movement sincere people who would no longer set foot in his house in order to avoid meeting Aveling.<sup>241</sup> It is very probable that such was the case with Morris, despite his inclination to set aside personal antipathies for the sake of unity and to show indulgence towards the weaknesses of his comrades in the struggle. We do not know what went on between him and Aveling, apart from the fact that the latter got fifty pounds out of him.<sup>242</sup> Things must have been pretty serious for Morris to have reached the point of calling him a "disreputable dog"<sup>243</sup> (we can find no other instance of such an epithet from his pen).

However, Morris remained in touch with the Marxist leaders. In March 1889 Laura Lafargue sent him her translation into English verse of the poems and songs of Eugene Pottier. In a very warm letter, Morris replied that, not only was her translation "excellent" but it was in itself, "good English verse", and he asked her permission to publish it in *Commonweal*.<sup>244</sup> In this same year, 1889, the International Socialist Workers Conference was held in Paris, and out of it came the Second International. A dissident congress was called simultaneously by Hyndman and the French "*possibilistes*", and, as a consequence, the former conference adopted a very definite political and theoretical position. Morris unhesitatingly agreed to take part, along with men like Bebel, Liebknecht, Bernstein and Lafargue. He led the British delegation and spoke against the opportunist proposal to merge the two conferences. Lafargue

co-ordinated the preparation of this great demonstration of revolutionary internationalism, in constant touch with Engels, and for months he corresponded with Morris, who published his letters in *Commonweal*. It lies outside my purpose to follow the course of this historic event, although the position taken up by Morris on this occasion is by itself worthy of note, in so far as it displays his faith in action in accordance with a definite ideology. It also marked a certain rapprochement with Engels. Lafargue's letters to the latter, during the months of preparation, clearly suggest this. For example, he wrote in May: "Morris is full of enthusiasm for the Congress; you must keep him up to it and make use of *Commonweal*", and in June: "... I will write to Morris ... unless you prefer to do it yourself".<sup>245</sup>

Later documents are scarce and we are completely without information about any contacts that may have existed between Morris and Engels during the last years of their lives. We find them together again on the same platform on 1 May demonstrations in 1891 and 1892,<sup>246</sup> and E. P. Thompson seeks this as "symbolic of the direction of his last years of work for the Cause". In this same year 1892, Engels published the first English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* and included in his preface the famous article which had made such an impression on Morris, explicitly recalling that it had appeared in *Commonweal* on 1 March 1885. Finally, in 1894, Engels read the theoretical handbook by Morris and Bax: *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*; he thought that the book cut right across the "shoddy stuff" published by Swan Sonnenschein,<sup>247</sup> and he thought well enough of it to send a copy to Sorge. No doubt he had a feeling that the time he had earlier devoted to talking with Morris had not been in vain.

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I have no ridiculous intention of introducing here an account of Marxist theory. Nor do I mean to make an inventory of all that Morris owed to Marxism. That would amount, in fact, to a premature study of Morris's utopia, which I shall undertake in the last part of this work. We shall see that this debt is immense. So I prefer to adopt a method which may not be to the liking of some but which seems to me to be more effective and more alive, and the sources will appear with greater clarity as we examine Morris's writings and thought. For the moment I want to confine myself to recalling very briefly certain very fundamental data which are not directly involved with his utopian thinking, but which form its basis and its point of departure.

Now Morris repeats in many forms throughout his writings that "the foundation of socialism is economical".<sup>249</sup> Also we find throughout his writings analyses of *Capital* and Marxist definitions of value, labour-power, surplus value and the mechanism of capitalist exploitation. I could accumulate quotations filling many pages. Not to overload my text, I will be content with one or two, and note references of various other writings which read just as convincingly. Here is an extract from a lecture of Morris's which I choose simply because it is one of the best known:

"Under the present system of wages and capital the 'manufacturer', having a monopoly of the means whereby the power to labour inherent in



every man's body can be used for production, is the master of those who are not so privileged . . . He therefore buys the labour-power of those who are bare of capital and can only live by selling it to him . . . It is clear that if he paid those with whom he makes his bargain the full value of their labour, that is to say, all that they produced, he would fail in his purpose. But since he is a monopolist of the means of productive labour, he can *compel* them to make a bargain better for him and worse for them than that; which bargain is that after they have earned their livelihood, estimated according to a standard high enough to ensure their peaceable submission to his mastership, the rest (and by far the larger part as a matter of fact) of what they produce shall belong to him, shall be his *property* to do as he likes with, to use or abuse at his pleasure." <sup>250</sup>

Many other expositions taken directly from *Capital* appear in innumerable texts, and I indicate the most characteristic by footnote. <sup>251</sup> Even in his fictional writings, Morris repeats these definitions, as when he explains the coming industrial age to John Ball. The worker, he says

"shall sell himself, that is the labour that is in him, to the master that suffers him to work, and that master shall give to him from out of the wares he maketh enough to keep him alive, and to beget children and nourish them till they be old enough to be sold like himself, and the residue shall the rich man keep to himself." <sup>252</sup>

This brief reminder should not give the impression that Morris contented himself with the most elementary of propositions. In his 1885 lecture: *Dawn of a New Epoch*, he takes his analysis as far as the division of surplus value between different branches of capital and even tackles the problem of ground rent and property rent. He deals with variations in the value of labour-power in *Misery and the Way Out*. One whole chapter of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome* is explicitly a summary of the economic section of *Capital*. Morris does not confine himself to these fundamental definitions but, in the wake of Marx and Engels, and often in the same terms, he takes to pieces the mechanism of the capitalist mode of production and displays its internal contradictions in the form of crises and "artificial famines". <sup>253</sup> His language then draws inspiration not only from *Capital* but also from the *Manifesto* and from *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*. The same applies when he talks of unemployment and of the "labour reserve army", a problem closely linked with the previous one and to which he returns, not only in books and lectures, <sup>254</sup> but also in many articles in *Commonweal*. From these same sources he took the idea of the "world market", that "abstraction" which dehumanises work and gives all products exchange value in place of use value, converting them into merchandise for sale and not for use. <sup>255</sup> And this brings us to the threshold of Morris's utopia and putting the world to rights. It is interesting to observe that the essence of all these authentically Marxist economic definitions, and in particular the basic ones, is to be found in the writings of 1884–86. One can sense a need in Morris to keep repeating them until he can feel them to be part of his own thinking.

On the level of superstructures, just as upon that of the economic infrastructure, Morris faithfully reproduces the formulations of Marx and Engels. This fidelity is particularly striking in his materialist conception of the State which is not an abstraction, nor an arbiter above the clash of interests, but, to repeat the words of the *Manifesto*, "the organised power of one class for oppressing another".<sup>256</sup> This idea, and the idea that the whole state apparatus is an apparatus at the service of the ruling class, is found throughout the columns of *Commonweal* and in most of his writings.<sup>257</sup> It is the consolidation of socialism which, once class society is abolished, will permit the withering away of the state that Morris describes in *News from Nowhere*. And here again, as we shall see, he follows Engels step by step.

One other theme is found unchanged in Morris and in Marx and Engels. It is the plan of the succession of social structures. The only gap is the Asiatic manner of production, but it was hardly touched upon in the books available to Morris and it was normal in his time for attention not to be drawn towards this important stage, the study of which has only really begun at a quite recent date.<sup>258</sup> The whole of the first part of his lecture *True and False Society* (1886) describes the successive historical structures; primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, bourgeois society,<sup>259</sup> and this description appears in many other of his writings.<sup>260</sup> It is by no means mechanical, but, on the contrary, founded upon the development of the internal contradictions of each structure and upon the class struggle, "the motive force of history". This fundamental theme runs through all his work from 1884 on and it would be pointless to choose between the hundreds of available quotations. Concerning the change from capitalism to socialism, Morris was very much aware of the formulations of the *Manifesto* which mocked at "the selfish conception that induces you to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason . . . your present mode of production and form of property", a conception shared "with every ruling class that has preceded you".<sup>261</sup> Morris, in his turn, insisted many times, from 1883 on,<sup>262</sup> upon the fact that the very movement of history made it impossible to believe that the present system would last forever. He also remembered that "the bourgeoisie produces its own gravediggers"<sup>263</sup> and over and over again he drew inspiration from the justly famous passage of *Capital* upon "the expropriation of the expropriators" and the "negation of the negation".<sup>264</sup> After recalling the dispossession of the peasant and the artisan and their reduction to wage-labour, he asserts in his turn:

"... the capitalist or modern slave-owner has been forced by his very success . . . to organize his slaves, the wage-earners, into a co-operation for production so well arranged that it requires little but his own elimination to make it a foundation for communal life . . . his own advance in wealth and power has bred for him the very enemy who is doomed to make an end of him."<sup>265</sup>

Morris returned many times to this central idea of the contradiction between the collective nature of production and the individual nature of appropriation, and to the fact that capitalism itself created the necessary conditions for the transformation to socialism.<sup>266</sup> So, as Marx says, "with the inexorability of a law of nature, capitalist production begets its own

negation."<sup>267</sup> Morris unreservedly supports this conception which,

"starting with a historical view of what had been, and seeing that a law of evolution swayed all events in it, was able to point out to us that the evolution was still going on, and that, whether Socialism be desirable or not, it is at least inevitable."<sup>268</sup>

It is essential for us to pause a moment at this point, because the Marxist *Entwicklungstheorie*, the theory of development, has been and still is the object of totally erroneous interpretations which utterly falsify the thinking of Marx and Engels, and, through them, of Morris. There has never been any question on their part of a mechanistic fatalism leaving no room for human intervention. Posed in this fashion, it would be a theory to prevent action and be anti-human. More than one historian of utopias, through ignorance or lack of understanding of Marxism, has condemned himself to pose unreal problems and formulate strange conclusions. Raymond Ruyer asks how this theory, or rather the theory he imagines he reads in Marx, can be reconciled with soviet planning; it represents, he declares, "the antithesis of the utopian spirit"<sup>269</sup> (which is true up to a point but not at all as he understands it; I shall come back to this in the conclusion of the present work). In the same way, G. Fritzsche declares outright that Morris cannot lay claim to scientific socialism because he does not repudiate free will, even though he sees the "theory of development" as the welcome harbinger of socialism.<sup>270</sup>

Let us set the facts straight and see what was really said by Marx and Engels, and, after them, by Morris. "Men", wrote Marx,

"make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>271</sup>

Engels in his turn said:

"Active social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand and reckon with them. But when once we understand them, when once we grasp their action, their direction, their effects, it depends only upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will, and by means of them to reach our own ends."<sup>272</sup>

This dialectical unity of the movement of history and the conscious will of man was many times expressed by Morris as well, in very clear fashion, particularly in an article in *Commonweal* which has never been republished and from which I extract this significant fragment:

"Although commercial ruin *must* be the main stream of the force for bringing about the revolution, we must not forget the other stream, which is the *conscious* hope of the oppressed classes, forced into union and antagonism by the very success of the commercial system . . ."<sup>273</sup>  
(Morris's italics.)

It cannot be a matter of a subjective and arbitrary act of will, but of a necessary intervention in the direction demanded by the laws of history:



"we have not set ourselves to build up a system to please our tastes, nor are we seeking to impose it upon the world in a mechanical manner, but rather . . . we are assisting in bringing about a development of history which would take place without our help, but which, nevertheless, compels us to help it".<sup>274</sup>

And this essential intervention on the part of man calls all his qualities into play: "intelligence enough to conceive . . ., courage enough to accept . . ., power enough to force . . ." <sup>275</sup> There are many passages of Morris's writings that point in the same direction.<sup>276</sup>

And this is the shattering point of fundamental difference between mechanistic determinism and dialectical materialism. In his third *Thesis upon Feuerbach*, Marx wrote:

"The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to re-educate the educator himself." <sup>277</sup>

The *Theses on Feuerbach* first appeared in 1888, in Stuttgart, as an appendix to *Ludwig Feuerbach*, by Engels, who had found them in an old notebook belonging to Marx. While this work was still being printed in Germany, William Morris wrote, in the same year, in one of his lectures that was among the richest in content:

" . . . if individual men are the creatures of their surrounding conditions, . . . it must be the business of man as a social animal, or of Society, if you will, to make the surroundings which make the individual man what he is. Man must and does create the conditions under which he lives; let him be conscious of that, and create them wisely." <sup>278</sup>

A strange coincidence of thought and date! There can be little doubt that Morris had been informed of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, either through the agency of Bax or directly by Engels himself. Any doubt is made less probable by the fact that another of these *Theses*, the sixth, which denies the existence of an abstract and eternal human nature and defines the human essence as "the ensemble of the social relations" was familiar to Morris and underlies the ideology of *News from Nowhere*.<sup>279</sup>

"The occurrence simultaneously of a change in conditions and human activity," Marx added in his third *Thesis*, "can only be comprehended and rationally understood as a revolutionary fact."

But this "revolutionary fact" could not be, I repeat, subjective and arbitrary. It demands a precise understanding of the laws of history and, to the extent to which man bows to their demands, he succeeds in mastering them, in turning them to his own ends and in winning his freedom. Engels has developed this idea in a well-known passage:

"The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history – only from that time will the social causes set in motion by him have, in the man and

in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.”<sup>280</sup>

William Morris subscribes unreservedly to this fundamental thesis of materialist humanism, and in his turn recommends “this knowledge of necessity which has been defined by a philosopher as being the only true liberty”.<sup>281</sup> With extraordinary boldness he goes even further and bases morality upon this understanding which comprehends and dominates necessity. Thanks to scientific socialism, the capitalist law of the jungle is, henceforth, counterbalanced by “the two great forces which rule the world, Necessity and Morality”.<sup>282</sup> In the same way as Engels declared that social forces “so long as we do not understand and reckon with them” are, like the forces of nature, “blind, violent, destructive”, Morris warns against a fatalism or belief in spontaneity which would reject the intervention of this scientific understanding, moral, liberating and, finally, humanising. If, he writes, we

“give it all up into the hands of necessity, Society will explode volcanically with such a crash as the world has not yet witnessed”.<sup>283</sup>

Similarly, he, in his turn, rejected the conception dear to pre-Marxist socialists, held by Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, by which the revolution could only be brought about by the act of some prince or leader. The constitution of the Socialist League, repeating that of the First International, followed Marx in proclaiming that “the liberation of the workers will be brought about by the workers themselves”. The leap from the rule of necessity to the rule of liberty will be the result of a struggle carried on in accordance with the laws of history, by the mass struggle of the workers enriched by scientific theory. The means of this enrichment and the leadership of this struggle will be the great socialist party, whose task is to “educate and organise” and of which Morris dreamed throughout his work after 1883.

\* \* \*

So it is manifestly absurd to attempt to contrast Morris’s ideology with some mechanistic and catastrophic fatalism or other, uncomprehendingly dubbed Marxism. On the contrary, with Marx as with Morris, man’s intervention is fundamental, and, far from being diminished, its importance is that much greater for its being conscious, historical and scientific. Men are not passive pawns upon an economic chess-board, and when Marx strove to decipher the laws which determine the evolution and succession of social structures, he himself insisted upon the fact that these are human societies, made up of beings differing from animals in the sense that the worker, as he changes natural materials, “realises a purpose of his own . . . to which he must subordinate his will.”<sup>284</sup> Work, for Marx as for Morris, is the point of departure of a materialistic humanism, whose reality has all too often been wilfully concealed. The sum of social relationships which constitutes the human essence (*Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach*) has its basis in production, in man’s work.

“By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers . . .”<sup>285</sup>

Work is the distinctive characteristic of the species. It is a necessity for its existence and will become, in communist society, "the first necessity of living",<sup>286</sup> once the leap has been made from the rule of necessity to that of freedom.

It was not as impassive spectators, despite the scientific rigour of their analyses, that Marx and Engels took apart the mechanism of capitalist exploitation and the alienation of the worker. The whole historical section of *Capital* and the dreadful descriptions in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* denounce the *inhuman* character of the present mode of production and the conditions of work in large-scale industry.

"At the same time that factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity. The lightening of the labour, even, becomes a sort of torture, since the machine does not free the labourer from his work, but deprives the work of all interest. Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour-process but also a process of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality. By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the labourer, during the labour-process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates and pumps dry, living labour-power."<sup>287</sup>

Morris finds no stronger terms when he, in his turn, denounces the dehumanisation of work by the machine, and this is true also about the division of labour. He had already encountered this denunciation in Ruskin, but it would come more convincingly in Marx, purged of all idealist moralising and placed in a strictly coherent context:

"It converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts . . . Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation . . . Some crippling of the mind and body is inseparable even from the division of labour in society as a whole . . . [it] attacks the individual at the very roots of his life, it is the first to afford the materials for, and to give a start to, industrial pathology."<sup>288</sup>

Against this division of labour, Marx, and after him, Morris, set the necessary diversity of occupation, which, alone, in a socialist society, will allow of the realisation of the "fully developed individual".<sup>289</sup> This division has, as its historical origin and "foundation . . . the separation between town and country",<sup>290</sup> and it was under the impulse of Marx that Morris strove to resolve the contradiction, as well as the one which had grown up between manual and intellectual work. It is through a detailed study of Morris's utopia that we can best assess the close relationship which binds Morris's humanism to that of Marx. I am well aware that certain Marxists, ready as they are to use



this term when referring to Morris, hesitate, in the name of scientific accuracy, to use it when speaking of Marxism. But it is only a matter of agreeing upon the meaning of words and keeping clearly in mind the definition of the human essence, purged of Feuerbachian conceptualism and identified with the sum of social relationships. It is from this materialist viewpoint that Marxist humanism is revealed in all its fecundity. Morris, as we shall see, made no mistake and, following Karl Marx, conceived of future society as “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”.<sup>291</sup>

While Marx and Engels did not venture into the details of anticipation, they set out the markers, and Morris’s utopia is based upon these primary data with astonishing consistency. For example, it faithfully follows Engels’s predictions on the withering away of the State. But we shall find a much greater cause for astonishment in observing that the poet’s utopian thinking rests upon the fundamental theory of two stages, as it was formulated by Karl Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, which was not published before 1891 and lay with other unpublished manuscripts among the papers of Engels. I propose to compare the texts in due course. For the moment I rest content with wondering whether the intermediary of Bax suffices to explain so profound an identity of thought – an identity of thought which shows on many other points and sometimes also when the original passages of Marx and Engels were still unpublished.

PART THREE

COMMUNIST SOCIETY





## CHAPTER ONE

# *Barbarism or Socialism: The Dialectics of an Alternative*

In April 1885, William Morris was deeply affected by reading Richard Jefferies' novel, *After London*.<sup>1</sup> His "hatred of civilisation" had met kindred expression and drew a vengeful satisfaction from this picture of accursed London disappearing in a mysterious cataclysm. Nature, convulsed, freed from artificial constraints, savagely reasserted its rights and wiped out every trace of the great centre of human population, rotted by "commercialism" and by monstrous, mercantile machine-like society. The survivors, roaming in primitive destitution, gradually came together and attempted to set up a new social existence, undeniably cruel and horrible, yet bearing a confused hope for the elaboration of more natural values, more in keeping with the deeper aspirations of the species. A confused hope, vaguely outlined, constantly contradicted and lacking all real prospect. But what matter to Morris! His sturdy enthusiasm and confident vitality found nourishment in this idea, something to chew over. His heart drew "absurd hopes" from it.<sup>2</sup> Obsessed by this phantasmagoria of the cataclysm and the return to barbarism, he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones a few weeks later that he no longer had any faith in the future of civilisation, that he knew it to be doomed to destruction, possibly very shortly:

"What a joy it is to think of! and how often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking the place of our wretched hypocrisies. With this thought in my mind all the history of the past is lighted up and lives again to me. I used really to despair once because I thought what the idiots of our day call progress would go on perfecting itself: happily I know now that all that will have a sudden check – sudden in appearance I mean – 'as it was in the days of Noë' . . ." <sup>3</sup>

The violence of Morris's tone must not, of course, lead us to suppose that he, in the manner of Jefferies, was envisaging the prospect of a natural disaster to resolve all problems. He was not given to such puerility, and his thought, if not yet clarified, was at least fairly complex. Let us not forget that, at the moment of writing these lines, he had just founded the Socialist League. Things he says in the same letter show him to be up against many difficulties that rather discourage him:<sup>4</sup> the leadership at his disposal was weak and few in number, and the prospects for the new party were far from brilliant. Contradictory ideas were inextricably muddled in his mind and continued to be so until dialectical clarity showed their simultaneous opposition and unity. He appreciated the paucity of his means while believing with passionate conviction in the

possibility of revolution, and he was no less convinced of the inevitable decay of capitalist society. He had a theory of revolution, but, at the same time, the seduction of spontaneity had not altogether left him. This "sudden check" was, in his thinking, both revolutionary action and (at one and the same time) an unexpected event arising from inevitable development.<sup>5</sup>

This reliance upon the timely event was nothing new with him. It was as old as his "hatred of civilisation". Back in 1874, dreaming of idyllic little rural communities, he thought that, even if it could not be happy, contemporary life would regain historical dignity if it were shaken by serious and tragic events<sup>6</sup> and in the same year he wrote to Mrs. G. Howard: "So perhaps the gods are preparing troubles and terrors for the world (or our small corner of it) again, so that it may once again become beautiful and dramatic withal . . ." <sup>7</sup>

In his first public lecture, on 4 December 1877, mentioning the general decline in the arts, he thought that only a sudden "turn in events" could bring about a reversal;<sup>8</sup> and, in 1882, talking on the same topic at the Midland Institute in Birmingham, he hoped that: "A change will come, perhaps after some great disaster has chilled us into pausing, and so given us time for reflection . . ."<sup>9</sup> One can see just how far Morris's own preoccupations made him receptive in advance to the utopia of R. Jefferies. Perhaps too, in his more or less conscious memory, reading *After London* awoke an obscure recollection of Henry George's somewhat hazy pages on the fatality of a glacial catastrophe. Morris never made any reference to it, but, as we have seen, the idea of a return to barbarism appeared several times in *Progress and Poverty*, in terms which sketch out some of our poet's most curious ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Nor must we forget Morris's ardent familiarity with Nordic mythology. Among the ancient Icelandic myths, that of the "ragna rök", the great battle of the gods against the forces of evil, which ultimately conquered and inaugurated a new order, made a great impression upon his thinking. It was also the first intimation that no social order was unchangeable and that violence was history's midwife. The legend wrapped the twilight of the gods in strange and catastrophic mists.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Morris's long study of the Icelandic cycle brought him his first revelation of the ways of life of barbaric peoples, and the human values which these peoples appeared to sustain were in clear contrast with the hypocrisies, the pettiness and the ugliness of Victorian civilisation.

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If the concept of civilisation implicitly contains the opposite concept of barbarism, ambiguity and confusion reigned none the less in Morris's usage of the two words during the early years of his public life.

Several years elapsed before he finally gave the word civilisation its pejorative sense: the two uses of the term continued side by side for quite a while. The same applies to the word barbarism, and this lack of precision indirectly reflects the complexity and perplexity of his thought, as I have just analysed it from the letter written to Georgiana Burne-Jones in May 1885. However, one important nuance crept into his turn of phrase very early, with the word barbarism only having a pejorative sense in so far as it described a social structure

which had reached a dead end and was doomed to despair: in this sense, barbarism became synonymous with civilisation. We find a very striking example of this usage in a lecture of 1880, *The Beauty of Life*, which Morris published with a very significant epigraph, taken from Juvenal: "*propter vitam vivendi perdere causas*". In this lecture he was warning against the dangers which seemed most imminent in his eyes, namely, that "men in struggling towards the complete attainment of all the luxuries of life for the strongest portion of their race" (his formulation still had nothing Marxist about it) "should deprive their whole race of all the beauty of life", that the mastery achieved over nature would destroy the simplest and widest-spread gifts; that the strongest and wisest would thus enslave the simple people and reduce themselves to slaves, "and so at last drag the world into a second barbarism more ignoble, and a thousandfold more hopeless, than the first".<sup>12</sup> In the same way, a year later, at Nottingham, as he once again tackled the great theme of his early lectures, the degradation and death of art, he exclaimed that unless all classes, including, above all, the working class, joined together to prevent such a disaster, the result would be

"a return to barbarism, nay, to a state of degradation far worse than barbarism, for that was hopeful."<sup>13</sup>

Again in 1883, expressing his disgust with a society bloated with material comforts and deprived of all intellectual joys, he compared it to "a huge swine-stye" worse than "the grossest state of savagery which the world has known . . . for there was hope in it".<sup>14</sup>

For such was the alternative which he presented to his listeners in these pre-Marxist years, when the influence of Ruskin was still dominant, although intangibly enriched by a growing perception of the important rôle of the working class: either bring back joy into work and saturate the whole of life in art, taking it from the élite to make it a natural function of the whole people, or else "honestly" accept that art is to disappear and society sink into this "degradation far worse than barbarism". There seemed to him to be no possible compromise, and, for himself, he was quite ready to accept this disappearance.<sup>15</sup> Nor did he nurse any illusions about the survival of art in present society: it would inevitably succumb.<sup>16</sup>

But if civilisation, in its onward rush, were to become a barbarism with no hope and no escape, dragging down art in the wreckage, that did not mean that Morris would despair of the future of art. He did not yet know what new world would replace the old nor by what means the change would be brought about. But ". . . if the imaginative arts perish, some new thing, at present unguessed of, may be put forward to supply their loss in men's lives".<sup>17</sup> The inevitable death of art would even be beneficial. ". . . It will be but a burning up of the gathered weeds, so that the fields may bear more abundantly. I hold that men would wake up after a while, and look round and find the dullness unbearable, and begin once more inventing, imitating, and imagining, as in the earlier days. — That faith comforts me, and I can say calmly, if the blank space must happen, it must, and amidst its darkness the new seed must sprout".<sup>18</sup> Better to trust it to the earth than to have it to "rot in the miser's granary". Beyond "that possible night of the arts" will come a "new dawn".<sup>19</sup> But while we await this dawn, still ill-defined in Morris's mind, we must



observe with bitterness that art is dying and that, as things are at the moment, its death is a prerequisite to its rebirth.<sup>20</sup>

After he finally accepted scientific socialism, Morris's vision of the future became daily more clear, and his certainty of an extraordinary blossoming of the arts in the new society was constantly reiterated. But he was still convinced that a temporary death of art was inevitable, and that there was even a risk of its coming as a result of the revolutionary events themselves. Nevertheless, he was quite ready to accept it joyfully, because art would be reborn through the whole people expressing their pleasure in life.<sup>21</sup> In a truly astonishing moment of reflection, he went much further, to the point of considering that this eclipse might be prolonged far beyond the revolution to the end of the first stage of socialist society,<sup>22</sup> and perhaps even somewhat longer. His reason being, as Marx had already expressed it, that consciousness lags behind experience.

"Strange as it may seem, therefore, to some people, it is as true as strange, that Socialism, which has been commonly supposed to tend to mere Utilitarianism, is the only hope of the arts. It may be, indeed, that till the social revolution is fully accomplished, and perhaps for a little while afterwards, men's surroundings may go on getting plainer, grimmer and barer. I say for a little while afterwards, because it may take men some time to shake off the habits of penury on the one hand and inane luxury on the other, which have been forced on them by commercialism. But even in that there is hope; for it is at least possible that all the old superstitions and conventionalities of art have got to be swept away before art can be born again; that before that new birth we shall have to be left bare of everything that has been called art; that we shall have nothing left us but the materials of art, that is the human race with its aspirations and passions and its home, the earth; on which materials we shall have to use these tools, leisure and desire." <sup>23</sup>

This somewhat gloomy vision of the socialist phase, which must precede the arrival of communist society, expresses, as we shall see, Morris's personal aversions. But he knew that this stage cannot be cut short, and the hope of the days to come will make it tolerable. For the moment we must be content to observe that this idea of the death of art, although it continues the less precise ideas of Morris's pre-Marxist period, is no longer linked with the pessimistic idea of barbarism.

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It was the word barbarism which took on a new content for him, and passed from being negative to being positive. His long historical studies and his assimilation of historical materialism brought him to pore with increasing intentness over man's most remote past, giving to barbarism the precise meaning given to the word by Morgan, Marx and Engels. But he could not be satisfied with a purely objective study, and his thinking, constantly turning towards criticism of the present and vision of the future, discovered in this exploration of history a new set of human values which were to become apparent again, through the spiral of his dialectics, at a higher level in his utopia. As I have already indicated, we have no material proof that he read Engels's great work,

*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. But there is a strong presumption that he knew of it at least indirectly. A study of Morris's writings gives this presumption a probability that it is difficult to deny. In fact, apart from scattered remarks and observations in his articles and lectures, the romantic works of his later years, especially *The Roots of the Mountains* and even more *The House of the Wolfings*, contain descriptions of the barbarian society rigorously conforming to the analyses of Morgan and Engels. Finally, on two occasions, Morris published theoretic treatises on the matter which are no less orthodox: the first time, in 1886, jointly with Bax, in the series of articles published in *Commonweal* under the title *Socialism from the Root Up* which were later revised and collected in 1893 as the work *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*; the second time, under his name alone, in 1890, in another series of articles published in *Commonweal* and never reprinted, under the title *The Development of Modern Society*.

Without intending to go into the details of these anthropological studies, which were a matter of popularisation and contained no element of original research, and which would, moreover, take us beyond the strict limits of our purpose, it seems essential for me to make a very brief summary of the fundamental characteristics of this primitive society, as described by Morris for his readers.

The family, in the modern sense of the word, did not exist in barbarian society. The basic unit was the *gens* or clan (in his romances Morris uses the word *kindred*), based on consanguinity,<sup>24</sup> each one of which constituted a "House".<sup>25</sup> Relationship was established exclusively through maternal descent.<sup>26</sup> Because of this consanguinity, marriage was forbidden within the *gens*; each one was exogamous and its members married the members of one or several complementary *gentes*.<sup>27</sup> These *gentes* were in this way grouped into tribes, and the latter formed the people, or *thiod*.<sup>28</sup>

The essential characteristic of the *gens* was communal ownership<sup>29</sup> and their only institution was direct democracy.<sup>30</sup> *The House of the Wolfings* abounds in descriptions of these assemblies of clan, tribe or people where the freemen express their opinions and each participates in the collective decision. These common councils took place in the open air in the forest, far from fields and pastures, each in its appropriate place, according to whether it was the clan, the tribe or the people meeting, and every member was present.<sup>31</sup> Although the action of *The Roots of the Mountains* takes place at a later stage of development, at the beginnings of urban civilisation, the system of direct democracy is still in force. While we now meet the first officials with authority, such as the Aldermen and Wardens, these are elected by the assembly of the people (Folk-Mote), and it is in this assembly, where everyone has his say, that the important decisions about crimes, blood reparation, war and peace are made.<sup>32</sup>

There was no magistrature or police with power to punish murder. Such things were the collective business of the whole of the clan to which the victim belonged, according to a system of which we find the last traces in the Corsican vendetta. There was no central executive body, no State apparatus.<sup>33</sup> Only the assembly of the clan, the tribe or the people was sovereign.

My purposely brief summary cannot unfortunately convey the beauty and intensity of effect of a work like *The House of the Wolfings*. I may add that any



such attempt would seem superfluous after the remarkable commentary which has been made upon it by Mrs. Jessie Kocmanova in her invaluable work on the prose romances of William Morris.<sup>34</sup> But I should like to stress one point, and that is the evocative power of the narrative. Starting on the basis of solid historical knowledge (and more solid than he himself readily admitted, but we are now used to this odd reserve on the part of Morris), our poet described barbarian society with as much imaginative force as intuition and verisimilitude. Also, this lyrical reconstruction so conformed to the facts of the science of the time that a German scholar wrote Morris a long letter, admiring his erudition and enquiring after his sources. In commenting upon this somewhat ridiculous letter, which roused her father's ire, May Morris wrote that he was capable of "dreaming realities without having documentary evidence of them".<sup>35</sup> While it is true that he could "dream realities" and that all his writing is in many respects the work of a visionary, we find a fuller and more instructive version of this incident in the account left us by his son-in-law, H. Halliday Sparling. He, in fact, gives us the poet's direct reaction, and Morris, in his boisterous statement, gives us to understand that his novel is pure fiction ("all lies", he says), that this fictitious reconstruction is built up from a few true details, just as a palaeontologist builds up a lost species from fossil debris.<sup>36</sup>

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But let us not be beguiled into error by this analogy. While the rediscovery of barbarian ways and customs was a necessary step for Morris, and a more painstaking one than he would have us believe, it was not an end in itself. It took its place in the quest for human values that was the real object of his whole life, values he offered for the consideration of contemporary conscience as it hesitated at the crossroads of the future.

As early as 1880 or 1881 (the exact date of the lecture has not been established) he was expressing to his listeners his nostalgia for a primitive pastoral society in which men were unlettered, but filled with desires, uncouth but not brutal; their art was unpolished, but sincere and spontaneous, and they were responsive to poetry and the telling of tales; despite their heavy toil, they had leisure; no doubt they got drunk, they quarrelled and came to blows, even took to arms, but they were neither cruel nor unduly sensitive, they loved life and were ready to face death, and they lived in freedom and equality.<sup>37</sup> This vision was still idyllic and vague, indefinitely situated in an idealised early Middle Ages of imprecise period. By 1884, one feels that his reading and study were more substantial, and it was the barbarians of the fifth century, threatening the foundations of the power of Rome, whom he praised for:

"hatred of lies, scorn of riches, contempt of death, faith in the fair fame won by steadfast endurance, honourable love of women".<sup>38</sup>

Again in 1886, referring to the Saxons of the time of Beowulf, he described their courage, their love of liberty and due glory: "life amidst all its sufferings and hardships was a continuous poem to them".<sup>39</sup>

It was only after 1885 that these value judgments were based upon real knowledge of barbarian society. In terms very close to those used by Engels,<sup>40</sup> he attributes the virtues of this primitive world to the gentile organisation



itself. The supreme virtue, from which all the others derive – and this is the principal theme of *The House of the Wolfings* – is attachment to the *gens* or kindred, “the joy of fighting for the kindred and for the days to be”,<sup>41</sup> a formulation typical of Morris, conveying both the confidence of the Teutons in their institutions and the utopian preoccupation of the poet. In the same way, in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, the constant motive of the hero Hallblithe, throughout his adventures in search of his stolen bride, is fidelity to his kindred of the Ravens which leads him to reject the attractions and the mirages of immortality of the *Glittering Plain*.

In a letter to T. J. Wise, explaining his intention in writing *The House of the Wolfings*, Morris wrote that the purpose of his book was “to illustrate the melting of the individual into the society of the tribes”.<sup>42</sup> Having spent years, in his articles and lectures, continuously denouncing the individualism and free competition of bourgeois society, and yearning for a society based upon free association, he sought moral and institutional inspiration in the primitive history of humanity, or simply perhaps a point of reference, since in his day it was not possible to refer to the real historical example of a successful socialist revolution.

In order to make Morris’s intentions more clear, I think it useful first to give the negative expression of this nostalgia for the virtues of barbarism. In *The House of the Wolfings* Wolfkettle describes Roman society as he had seen it to his brothers. Truly, he says, their cities are many and wealthy, but it would be wrong to believe that each city is the dwelling place of a kindred. They have forgotten the kindreds, they do not have them; it matters little to them whom they marry and great is the confusion. Those in power decree where they are to live, what food they must eat, how long they should work even after they are tired, and what their way of life should be in all respects. Those who endure such a life have no claim to be called free men, and no house or kindred can oppose this domination and order. In truth, they are powerful but wretched. Their slaves are worse treated than their beasts of burden. These slaves and these unfortunate free men do all the work of tilling, of rearing and of craft. They are subject to men they call lords and masters, who do nothing. They cannot even forge their own arms, but lounge around all day indoors or out, wallowing in the sunshine or by their fireside, like degenerate dogs.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that, behind Roman society, it is the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century that Morris has in mind, with its class divisions, its exploitation, its strident inequality and corruption. So for him, the reference to barbarism is in essence anti-capitalist.

In the gentile society of the ancient Teutons, all goods were common property, fields, meadows and woodlands. They cultivated the land in common, grazed their flocks in common and all were adept at woodwork and ironwork. The women ran the house in common and joined in the councils; they were held in esteem and even played a leading rôle in the defence of the people attacked by the Romans. Private interest was something unthinkable and would have seemed a crime or, rather, an incomprehensible monstrosity.<sup>44</sup> Liberty was defined as the responsibility of each towards the community,<sup>45</sup> and we have seen the active rôle played by each, in assemblies, in the affairs of the *gens*, the tribe or the people, not relinquishing any of his rights or duties into the hands of authority.<sup>46</sup> By virtue of the sexually complementary nature of the kindreds,

peace reigned within the tribe, and no violence was necessary to acquire a wife.<sup>47</sup> In this free, equal and fraternal society, individualism was the ultimate degradation. When, in *The House of the Wolfings*, Thiodolf, acceding to the demands of Wood-sun, puts on the magic shirt of mail which will save his own life, so entailing the defeat of his people, he is not long in casting it off, preferring death to such baseness, and in the intoxication of community regained he cries:

"I have lived with them," (i.e., the kindreds) "and eaten and drunken with them, and toiled with them, and led them in battle and the place of wounds and slaughter; they are mine and I am theirs; and through them I am of the whole earth, and all the kindreds of it; yea, even of the foemen, whom this day the edges in mine hand shall smite." <sup>48</sup>

Doubtless to us such a human feeling seems anachronistic, but this consideration is secondary, after all. In Morris's mind, this sentiment was the logical deduction from objective data, and if this deduction was perhaps not achievable in the past period in question, it was a natural necessity for anti-individualist thinking in the present, which justified its transposition to utopia. The fundamental difference, in Morris's eyes, between barbarian society and modern society, was "that between an organism and a mechanism". All the aspects of that ancient life were "aspects of a living body", whereas, in civilised life, "all these elements have become mechanical, uniting to build up mechanical life, and themselves the product of machines material and moral".<sup>49</sup>

Another aspect, rich with lessons, struck Morris: that of abundance in poverty. "Thus then lived this folk in much plenty and ease of life, though not delicately nor desiring things out of measure. They wrought with their hands and wearied themselves; and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry; tomorrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing which they would fain forget: life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid." <sup>50</sup> Morris experienced the same feelings about the ancient Teutons as he did when he visited Iceland, and, up to the end of his life, he found "... our artificial poverty of civilization so much bitterer for those that suffer under it than the natural poverty of the rudest barbarism".<sup>51</sup>

When the great barbarian invasions swept over the western empire of Rome, which William Morris held in the contempt just indicated, it was, then, historically beneficial. They brought wholesomeness back to the world.<sup>52</sup> In the enormous upheaval they brought, the "old classical exclusiveness" was swept away,<sup>53</sup> and a breath of freedom revived the world, particularly in the arts.<sup>54</sup> Ancient barbarism, the destroyer of the art of antiquity which, following Ruskin, Morris regarded as an art with the mark of slavery upon it, was also the midwife of the Middle Ages, in which he saw the peak of our civilisation and the most important inspiration for his utopian world. It plunged the conquered lands into long chaos, but the new order arose at last in all its clarity and brilliance.<sup>55</sup> It was not a step back but forward.<sup>56</sup> The corruption of Roman society had led Europe into a blind alley without solution or hope. The barbarians gave hope back and regenerated it.<sup>57</sup> The "Northern Fury" spilled its primitive virtues over a world which was dying from having forgotten them "as the mountain torrent bears the gold".<sup>58</sup> Art, which cannot live in

decadence and artifice, revived, and "set all the world glittering with its brightness and quivering with its energy".<sup>59</sup>

\* \* \*

So if the lesson of history is to be learned and turned to profit, the remedy for the bankruptcy of capitalist civilisation should be a new barbarian invasion. Throughout Morris's work, this idea is just below the surface, and it loses its original brutal form only by emerging at a higher level, transformed and enriched by the opposing limits of the alternative.

Those Barbarians of other days, in fact, who descended upon Rome "like a thief in the night" constituted a "world which lay outside the rule of Rome".<sup>60</sup> But, he was forced to observe "... there is nothing *outside* civilization that we can turn to for new birth; whatever there is to help us must come from within."<sup>61</sup> "Since there is no longer any strong race left out of civilization, as in the time of the disruption of Rome, the whole struggle in all its simplicity between those who have and those who lack is *within* civilisation."<sup>62</sup> By 1884, Morris reached the goal of his thinking; surmounting the contradiction, he transformed the accounts of days gone by:

"To those who have the hearts to understand, this talk of the past is a parable of the days to come; of the change in store for us hidden in the breast of the Barbarism of civilization – the Proletariat . . ." <sup>63</sup>

A little later he says, identifying himself as a communist with the working class:

"So we shall be our own Goths, and at whatever cost break up again the new tyrannous Empire of Capitalism." <sup>64</sup>

The significant loading of the word barbarian has, thus, finally changed from negative to the limits of the positive, and the alternative is suppressed by the integration of the opposites. Just as ancient barbarism was the midwife of mediaeval culture, modern barbarism is the bearer of hope, because it will be the midwife of socialism. There is no doubt that the terms in which the problem is here expressed ran a great risk those days of upsetting some people, and equally no doubt that such an approach bears the involuntary mark of Morris's bourgeois conscience, ineradicable on his own admission, despite his disinterestedness, his sincerity and his devotion. An effort of historical comprehension is clearly needed. The picture of the English working class left by Engels or by Mayhew around the middle of the nineteenth century, and, later, by Charles Booth, provides a spectacle of horror and degradation. For a wealthy bourgeois like Morris to have succeeded, through the light of the message of Ruskin and, even more, of the analyses of Karl Marx, in understanding, despite his cultured sensibilities, the historical rôle of that working class, in loving it, in fighting alongside it, that is something which compels respect. The use here made of the word barbarism, far from being intentionally pejorative, is contained within a "parable" that in no way runs counter to the teachings of historical materialism.

In developing that parable, Morris found yet another occasion to express his absolute confidence in the proletariat. It is in itself striking that it should have



appeared very early, within the context of this idea, since his basic preoccupation was before all else aesthetic and not yet social. I have quoted from the uncertainly dated lecture (1880 or 1881), *Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, in which Morris showed how the invasion of the Barbarians had precipitated that rebirth of art which "set all the world glittering with its brightness, and quivering with its energy". In the same way, he went on,

"we may surely hope that the residuum of modern civilization, the terror of radical politicians, and the tool of reactionists, will become the great mass of orderly thinking people, sweet and fair in its manners, and noble in its aspirations, and that, we cannot too often repeat, is the sole hope of worthy, living, enduring art: nothing else, I say, will help the arts".<sup>65</sup>

This passage is of some interest, for it shows that the "parable" already existed in Morris's mind while he was still only a reformist liberal, and that his conception of a reborn society tallied with the image of a proletariat decently educated into the middle classes. It is plain that Morris's confidence in the working class, as we see it in this first sketch of the parable, is somewhat more condescending and unattractive than the revolutionary formulation of 1884, which has a touch of epic grandeur. Then, Morris's confidence is frank and without reservation, and the problem of the death of art is resolved without the slightest ambiguity. In May 1884, coming away in disgust from the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy, he declared that if the revolution were to sweep away all this sham art without allowing any hope for a renewal, the loss would not be great, but he thought that not only would this sham art be swept away, but that there would also be a great prospect of seeing a new art arising in a society based on equality: "there will be no loss but immeasurable gain."<sup>66</sup>

The myth of the new barbarians is then, a constructive and optimistic myth. To understand this, it suffices to compare it with the eighteenth-century myth of the "noble savage": a sentimental, moralising myth, critical of aristocratic corruption, an illicit bundle of illusory bourgeois virtues and half-conscious illusion, unrealistic nostalgia, leading to no positive outcome. The only common element is the reference to social structures which questioned the permanence of the existing structures, but our poet goes much further!<sup>67</sup>

Morris's new barbarians have the merit of existing and of having a historical rôle to play: he is building the future upon what they will one day be, and upon what they are already, upon the potential for liberation that exists within them. It is their very "barbarism" which will be the yeast for the new upsurge of mankind. At this point I want to bring together two passages which outstandingly illustrate the direction of the development of Morris's thinking in this respect. In 1879, he was still a bourgeois aesthete interested in social problems, horrified by the ugliness of his times, eager to understand history, who had for a long time been asking himself questions about the future of humanity. He was already obsessed by the invasion of the barbarians which destroyed the civilisation of antiquity, with its basis in moral and material slavery. He looked back to man's awakening to art following this infusion of new life, and with a thought foreshadowing the "parable" he exclaimed:

"What has come of that in later times, nay, what may yet come of it in days that we shall not live to see, we may not consider now."<sup>68</sup>

Eleven years later, writing *News from Nowhere*, he knew the regenerative force of this "barbarism", and his hero, visiting old Morsom's museum, admired the first artistic creations made by men after the revolution, "rough and unskilful in handiwork, but solid and showing some sense of pleasure in the making":

"They are very curious," said I, taking up a piece of pottery from amongst the specimens which the antiquary was showing us; "not a bit like the work of savages or barbarians, and yet with what would once have been called a hatred of civilization impressed upon them." <sup>69</sup>

The conclusion of his lecture, *The Aims of Art* (1886), constitutes, if it is read attentively, a sort of self-criticism. It is purely and simply a condemnation of the nostalgia for cataclysm which had possessed him during the previous year after reading Jefferies' novel. There are, he says, two current conceptions concerning the future of our society. One, that of socialism, is optimistic:

"I have given you the Socialist or Optimist view of the matter. Now for the Pessimist view.

I can conceive that the revolt against Artificial Famine or Capitalism, which is now on foot, may be vanquished. The result will be that the working class – the slaves of society – will become more and more degraded; that they will not strive against overwhelming force, but, stimulated by that love of life which Nature, always anxious about the perpetuation of the race, has implanted in us, will learn to bear everything – starvation, overwork, dirt, ignorance, brutality. All these things they will bear, as, alas! they bear them too well even now; all this rather than risk sweet life and bitter livelihood, and all sparks of hope and manliness will die out of them.

Nor will their masters be much better off: the earth's surface will be hideous everywhere, save in the uninhabitable desert; Art will utterly perish, as in the manual arts so in literature, which will become, as it is indeed speedily becoming, a mere string of orderly and calculated ineptitudes and passionless ingenuities; Science will grow more and more onesided, more incomplete, more wordy and useless, till at last she will pile herself up into such a mass of superstition, that beside it the theologies of old time will seem mere reason and enlightenment. All will get lower and lower till the heroic struggles of the past to realize hope from year to year, from century to century, will be utterly forgotten, and man will be an indescribable being — hopeless, desireless, lifeless.

And will there be deliverance from this even? Maybe man may, after some terrible cataclysm, learn to strive towards a healthy animalism, may grow from a tolerable animal into a savage, from a savage into a barbarian, and so on; and some thousands of years hence he may be beginning once more those arts which we have now lost, and be carving interlacements like the New Zealanders, or scratching forms of animals on their cleaned bladebones, like the pre-historic men of the drift.

But in any case, according to the Pessimist view, which looks upon revolt against Artificial Famine as impossible to succeed, we shall wearily trudge the circle again, until some accident, some unforeseen consequence of arrangement, makes an end of us altogether. <sup>70</sup>

That pessimism I do not believe in, nor, on the other hand, do I suppose that it is altogether a matter of our wills as to whether we shall further human progress or human degradation; yet, since there are those who are impelled towards the Socialist or Optimistic side of things, I must conclude that there is some hope of its prevailing, that the strenuous efforts of many individuals imply a force which is thrusting them on.”<sup>71</sup>

Here, then, is a clear and plain rejection of what I have called “negative barbarism”. Even more plain and clear is Morris’s choice of words when he touches upon the same theme in *News from Nowhere*. There again, in the course of the long conversation between old Hammond and his guest, the possibility of another solution is mentioned: the destruction of capitalism by its own decay “till it should at last reach a condition as rude as barbarism, but lacking both the hope and the pleasures of barbarism”. Hammond is categorical:

“Between them,” said I, quickly, “they destroyed commercialism?”

“Yes, yes, YES,” said he; “that is it. Nor could it have been destroyed otherwise; except, perhaps, by the whole of society gradually falling into lower depths, till it should at last reach a condition as rude as barbarism, but lacking both the hope and the pleasures of barbarism. Surely the sharper, shorter remedy was the happiest?”

“Most surely,” said I.<sup>72</sup>

The rejection of decay, regarded as a pessimistic and defeatist solution, also indicates a more thorough assimilation of Marxism. It expresses Morris’s rejection of certain mechanistic interpretations and of that temptation to favour spontaneity, to which, as we have seen, he had not been deaf. Here again, self-criticism underlies it all. Henceforth, man’s rôle is, for him, indispensable, and he expresses this fact in 1888, in words that recall the “parable”:

“If the present state of society merely breaks up without a conscious effort at transformation, the end, the fall of Europe, may be long in coming, but when it does, it will be far more terrible, far more confused and full of suffering than the period of the fall of Rome.”<sup>73</sup>

But the socialist rejection of decay was in no way inconsistent with the search for barbarian values. These two streams of Morris’s thought became inextricably mingled. It had nothing in common with the helpless nostalgia against which Karl Marx fulminated in 1844, those “good-humoured enthusiasts, Teutomaniacs by upbringing and freethinkers by reflexion, [who] seek for our history of freedom beyond our history in the Teutonic primeval woods.” To these Marx retorted:

“... as one shouts into the wood, so one’s voice comes back in answer ... Therefore peace to the Teutonic primeval woods. But *war* to German conditions, at all events!”<sup>74</sup>

No one can accuse Morris of not having made war against the situation in England. But his exploration of the “Teutonic woods” was not purposeless either. First, he found there the origins and a deep sense of the popular aspirations which inspired the Middle Ages, and which he reflected in his



utopia.<sup>75</sup> Engels before him had already reached a similar conclusion.<sup>76</sup> Engels had also thought that the primitive communism of the barbarian *gentes* was full of lessons for the future:

“... the immense advantage of barbarian production, which was lost with the coming of civilization; to reconquer it, but on the basis of the gigantic control of nature now achieved by man and the free association now made possible, will be the task of the next generations”,<sup>77</sup> and Engels ended his work with a quotation from Morgan of which this is the last sentence:

“It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient *gentes*.”<sup>78</sup>

Morris speaks in just the same language when he refers to the spiral development of history and suggests that

“in the future that shall immediately follow on this present we may have to recur to ideas that today seem to belong to the past only that will not be really a retracing of our steps but rather a carrying on of progress from a point where we abandoned it a while ago”.<sup>79</sup>

I shall return to this fundamental idea when we study the dialectics of Morris's utopia.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Necessity for Utopia*

Although the socialist choice was for William Morris the necessary point of departure for a vision of future society, it could not, by itself, set in motion the machinery of utopian creativity. One can be a socialist or a communist without possessing any urge to explore the future, and it is known that Karl Marx was very circumspect in so doing. So it is necessary to seek the subjective motives and the objective reasons for Morris's activity.

Two of these motives were of a general nature and would not, in themselves, have been decisive, but they contributed to the decision and I should be wrong to overlook them. They are his taste for happiness and his natural optimism.

Before Louis Aragon, William Morris might have exclaimed: "Happiness exists and I believe in it". The whole work of him whom Yeats has dubbed "the happiest of the poets"<sup>1</sup> is a constant hymn to joy, a call to battle for the development of mankind, and Morris proclaims that he shares this love of happiness with the human race:

"I want to be happy, and even sometimes, say generally, to be merry; and I find it difficult to believe that that is not the general desire".<sup>2</sup>

"... All men must of their very nature strive for happiness",<sup>3</sup> and every man comes into the world with that as his birthright.<sup>4</sup> The greatest condemnation of bourgeois society is its total incapacity to ensure this. Such a society must be destroyed, and the original objective of the socialist revolution is to make men happy: if it loses sight of this aim, it opens the way to counter-revolution.<sup>5</sup> The world to be built by the men of tomorrow will be "... a society of which no one need ask the question, 'Why does it exist?'"<sup>6</sup> This belief in happiness, which nothing in the appearance of the contemporary world seems to justify, could only find untrammelled expression in the depicting of a society in which the material conditions for *joie de vivre* existed. *News from Nowhere* is an act of faith in the possibility of being happy, and utopia gives Morris's deepest aspiration its purest expression.

Is that to say that one must see this utopian dream as an escape or a compensation? Such an interpretation is attractive at first glance, and the majority of critics have not failed to accept it with complacency. There has been much stress laid upon Morris's disappointment in love. In 1964, the release of the correspondence exchanged between Rossetti and Jane Morris strengthened this tendency, and a somewhat mechanical use of the symbols and vocabulary of psychoanalysis gave it an air of learning. Reference has also been made to the artist's professional unfulfilment, forced to cater for the luxurious needs of wealthy customers, when his dream was of popular art. There has been much

talk about his political disappointments and some, such as W. Scawen Blunt, have not hesitated to claim that they finally turned him away from socialism, which is patently absurd.<sup>7</sup> It is certain that it was painful for Morris to meet for so long with the apathy of the working class, that he lost his illusions about a rapid collapse of capitalism and that he developed a serious sense of bitterness about the irreparable divisions which set the various factions of the socialist movement against each other. All that is true, and it gives us grounds to think that his utopian imagination was a great comfort to him. But I find it, at the very least, extreme to venture any further down that road. To speak of compensation, as though the whole of his life had been frustration, does not bear examination. When Morris wrote *News from Nowhere*, he was already a man whose name commanded respect and admiration, even from his political opponents, and he was already beginning to be regarded as a prophet of socialism: he was fully conscious of having made a considerable contribution to the spreading of revolutionary ideas.<sup>8</sup> On the artistic level, his career was dazzling and the art of decoration was transformed by his influence. Even in the sphere of his private life, where he had received some very hard knocks, he had shown an extraordinary ability to sustain them. It appears that, after Rossetti's death, not the slightest upset troubled his married life, and towards Jane he was a husband characterised by delicacy and attentiveness. I must add that we have not the slightest knowledge as to whether he found effective compensation at the time of crisis: the curious destruction of certain correspondence leaves the question in the air. But there are secondary considerations. What one tends too easily to neglect, when striving to explain utopia as a need for compensation, is the dominant rôle of reason in Morris's thinking. The self-control shown in his letters at the height of his suffering is not to be explained by feeble cowardice nor by tactics. It is the fruit of critical thought about the relationship between the sexes, expressed in *News from Nowhere*, in terms of the deepest wisdom, by the rejection of all romantic mawkishness.<sup>9</sup> The psychoanalytical explanation of utopia cannot be rejected, but it is only a fragment of explanation, and in Morris's case its interest is somewhat anecdotal. When, in the course of this present study, I have established the extent to which Morris's utopia was rationally motivated by political reflection and built upon a scientific theory of society, I believe that it will be apparent that reliance upon this single explanation would display obsessional narrowness and would drive us to distort Morris's thinking. If certain notes struck in the utopia (for example, the dramatic intensity of the character of Ellen in *News from Nowhere*) have their roots in personal frustration, is it legitimate to bring to these a theoretical elaboration in which the part of sheer fantasy is much smaller than it is generally reckoned to be?

After all, how does he himself describe this love of happiness, so deeply rooted in Morris's heart and which was one of the bases of his temperament long before any crisis? Above all, he tells us, happiness is joy in work, the sweetness of leisure, which is itself very often some other form of activity.<sup>10</sup> At no moment in his life was he ever denied this joy and this sweetness, and he needed no sublimation to carry them into his utopia.

The love of happiness was intimately bound up with his unshakeable confidence in the future, with the hope, as he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones in 1879, "that civilized people will grow weary of their worst follies and try to live



a less muddled and unreasonable life".<sup>11</sup> Men, he asserts, will certainly discover one day that it is more honourable and more worthy to create than to destroy.<sup>12</sup> He never heeded counsels of despair or ceased to believe in humanity's march towards a better future,<sup>13</sup> even if some found such a prophecy foolish:<sup>14</sup> those who are regarded as fools today shall be tomorrow's sages.<sup>15</sup> One can feel confidence in man because the thing that distinguishes him from animals is his sense of justice.<sup>16</sup> No doubt he displays much stupidity and more ignorance, but all in all little malice.<sup>17</sup> There would be no end to the list of expressions of optimism in William Morris, and they came from his pen until the end of his life. It is interesting to note that W. Scawen Blunt, who, pleading *pro domo*, would have us believe that Morris, chagrined and disillusioned by his political disappointments, had repudiated socialism, wrote in his diary on 29 May 1896, a few months before the poet's death:

"But he is not a pessimist, and thinks mankind the 'crown of things', in spite of man's destructive action and his modern craze for ugliness. His illness does not make him gloomy . . ." <sup>18</sup>

Morris was very conscious of the fundamental nature of his optimism, and he realised that it was this endowment of nature that had determined his political development. He defined himself by implicit contrast when he said of Rossetti:

"The truth is he cared for nothing but individual and personal matters; chiefly of course in relation to art and literature, but he would take abundant trouble to help any one person who was in distress of mind or body; but the evils of any mass of people he couldn't bring his mind to bear upon. I suppose in short it needs a person of hopeful mind to take disinterested notice of politics, and Rossetti was certainly not hopeful."<sup>19</sup>

Morris assuredly was "a person of hopeful mind". When his lively optimism found new reasons for hope with the discovery of historical materialism, it was not surprising that his confidence in the future should have chosen utopia as the natural outcome of that hope.

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But optimism and a love of happiness would not have been enough to make Morris the unique utopist that he was. It also needed the gift he possessed in a supreme degree, that of vision. In this connection, much has been said about his Welsh ancestry. I mention it too, although, in the event, these facile generalisations are even less tempting since Morris only showed a very passing interest in Celtic legends. It seems somewhat pointless to delve here into the mysteries of race and heredity, and more profitable to examine the aspects of this extraordinary visionary power possessed by Morris.

One thing stands out when one studies biographies and correspondence: it is the importance given to dreams by Morris, his family and his friends. In a letter to Webb, Jane describes his dreams and presentiments.<sup>20</sup> Burne-Jones also dreamed frequently, and when he met Jane they used to compare their

dreams.<sup>21</sup> Morris was no less prone to describe his own. Once he dreamed he had to draw a sausage after he had already eaten it.<sup>22</sup> Another time he saw a shooting star fall into the road and was afraid that it would cause an explosion.<sup>23</sup> I shall refrain from all learned thoughts upon these phantasms, and simply note the fact that, for Morris and his circle, the dream was not a phenomenon to be disregarded and that it held in their lives a place that was natural and, perhaps, privileged. For Morris it was, even, the most intense form of vision, if one is to believe the opening of *A Dream of John Ball*:

"Sometimes," he writes, "I am rewarded for fretting myself so much about present matters by a quite unasked-for pleasant dream. I mean when I am asleep . . . I see some beautiful and noble building new made, as it were for the occasion, as clearly as if I were awake; not vaguely or absurdly, as often happens in dreams, but with all the detail clear and reasonable."

And after describing other pictures thus seen in dreaming, he adds:

"All this I have seen in the dreams of the night clearer than I can force myself to see them in dreams of the day." <sup>24</sup>

Just as, for a number of his predecessors, navigation and shipwreck provided the normal procedure for an introduction into utopia, Morris had recourse to dreams both in *John Ball* and in *News from Nowhere*. But even more than a procedure for introduction, the dream is almost physiologically the natural form for his utopian aspirations. Is it not significant that, in the land of Nowhere, the Visitor, formerly obsessed by his dreams, finally "was in a dreamless sleep"? <sup>25</sup> It is striking, moreover, that in each of these two books, the force of conviction is such that one does not have the slightest sensation of a contrived artifice: rational thought and dream are here welded with ardent sincerity, to the point that, in Morris's own final words, it is no longer a question of a dream, but of a vision.<sup>26</sup> Particularly characteristic is the episode in the last chapter of *News from Nowhere*, where the dreamer returns to the reality of the nineteenth century through a nightmare of classic form, that of the menacing cloud:<sup>27</sup> it is the dream within a dream, a device which Morris had already used in certain tales in *The Earthly Paradise* (notably *The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon*). In the same way the evocation of John Ball by Morris coincides with the evocation of Morris by John Ball: their meeting has been a reciprocal dream.<sup>28</sup> But the dramatic intensity is such that we are scarcely aware of it. Morris's feeling and sincerity have destroyed all barriers and all conventions. We are side by side with him inside the vision, and one is not surprised to find him writing to Bruce Glasier, on 7 October 1890, that he had been for several weeks at Kelmscott, "where Ellen vanished, you know". <sup>29</sup>

This visionary gift had impressed his contemporaries. May Morris, in one of her introductions, repeated words written by Ruskin in 1869 about Keats and Morris: "So that you may obtain a more truthful idea of the nature of Greek religion and legend from the poems of Keats and the nearly as beautiful, and, in general grasp of subject, far more powerful, recent work of Morris, than from the frigid scholarship, however extensive. Not that the poet's impressions or rendering of things are wholly true, but their truth is vital, not formal." <sup>30</sup> Morris's vision, in fact, is always "vital", and it is supremely so, when, escap-

ing from the very literary framework of the poems which Ruskin was praising, he projects into utopia his deepest aspirations and his most reasoned enthusiasm. "In comparison with Morris," said Stopford A. Brooke, "most of the other poets are blind."<sup>31</sup>

Morris irritably comments upon this blindness in his contemporaries, and reproaches "civilization" with "its eyeless vulgarity".<sup>32</sup> "The suggestion of a hope I may, however, make, which is of course personal – which is that perhaps mankind will regain their eye-sight, which they have at present lost to a great extent . . . whereas in times past the eyes were the great feeders of the fancy and imagination."<sup>33</sup>

The pleasure in imagining the future came early to Morris, and we find traces of it in letters written as a young man.<sup>34</sup> But the intensity of the vision was not a constant phenomenon; that came only at privileged moments which he could recognise and relish: it was "that thin thread of insight and imagination which comes so seldom to us, and is such a joy when it comes".<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in September 1887, he wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones: "I had three very good days at Kelmscott: once or twice I had that delightful quickening of perception by which everything gets emphasized and brightened . . . Heaven in short. It comes not very commonly even in one's younger and brighter days, and does not quite leave one even in the times of combat . . ." <sup>36</sup>

But how was he to express what he saw? His correspondence reveals his gropings and uncertainties, but also the very penetrating consciousness of the special quality of his vision. Rossetti had recently urged upon him that there existed no other medium of expression than painting, and Morris had docilely listened. He soon appreciated his mistake, and renounced the art of the easel, which, moreover he detested. Nevertheless, this influence was lasting, and for many years he went on drawing from models. But he experienced a sense of impotence.

"It must be six years now since I made a habit of drawing and I never, if you can understand that, had the *painter's memory* which makes it easy to put down on paper what you think you see; nor indeed can I see any scene with a frame as it were round it, though in my own way I can realise things vividly enough to myself. . . ." <sup>37</sup>

His way of seeing was quite different: it could not allow itself to be restricted to the limited and still space of the canvas; he needed the fantasy of decoration and the untrammelled imagination of poetry, of the romantic tale and of utopia.

Even when he was writing, Morris remained before all else visual. His daughter May relates, of the period when he was writing *The Earthly Paradise*: "Even while he was writing he saw the episodes as pictures and noted in his margins hints for the woodcuts that Burne-Jones and himself were to make for the beautifying of his poems."<sup>38</sup> Not only did writing need a visual backing with him, but his vision of things needed to be precise, whether it was a question of art or politics.<sup>39</sup> The revolutionary positions adopted by the Socialist League in 1885 only really began to satisfy him from the moment when the new order destined to replace the corrupt régime of the bourgeoisie had taken shape in the minds of the militants. The details of this new life, as they were sketched in, only inspired a limited confidence: "And now at last when the



corruption of society seems complete, there is arising a definite conception of a new order, with its demands in some sort formulated. In the details of that I do not myself feel any great confidence, but that they have taken so much form is hopeful."<sup>40</sup> That was characteristic. Morris needed to see. Just recall the phrase which forms the *leit-motiv* of the first chapter of *News from Nowhere*: "If I could but see a day of it; if I could but see it!"<sup>41</sup>

This desire, this need to see the future, dated from the very first moments of his awakening consciousness of social realities. In 1880, he concluded his lecture on *The Beauty of Life* by exclaiming:

"... hope must be ever with us, and sometimes perhaps it will so quicken our vision that it will outrun the slow lapse of time, and show us the victorious days when millions of those who now sit in darkness will be enlightened by an Art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user."<sup>42</sup>

This impatience of vision sometimes wiped out the calm acceptance of the present. We, he said, are "now living between the past and the future".<sup>43</sup> This present is nothing but tangled undergrowth, through which the future shows, first only as a faint gleam,<sup>44</sup> until it becomes, as Morris's ideas take on more definite shape, the very light of life.<sup>45</sup> He was, in his critique and analysis of contemporary events, as well as in his articles and his lectures, constantly on the look-out for straws in the wind, which, he wrote, cannot fail to excite our imagination and encourage it to shape the picture of the happy world of tomorrow.<sup>46</sup>

In Morris's utopia, this visionary imagination is a fervour mingled with incessant anguish – that of always being apart from the vision. Long before *News from Nowhere*, this dark thread is to be found in the weave of his poetic work. Truly, in the youthful poems it is often nothing more than a somewhat traditional melancholy, that which inspires the difficult passage from the world of dreams to the pitiless world of fact.<sup>47</sup> Yet already, in *The Earthly Paradise*, we can read quite a curious story, *The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, in which the hero, John, wanders desperately in an enchanted land where the inhabitants do not see him, nor hear him, nor even feel his touch!<sup>48</sup> The atmosphere is already almost that of the last chapter of *News from Nowhere*.

We do not find a repetition of this extreme tension in *A Dream of John Ball*, but the anguish is there again and again. Morris feels himself quite at home with these fourteenth-century peasants, and yet he has the feeling of being an intruder.<sup>49</sup> He guesses that John Ball has penetrated the secret of his identity and knows that his presence is ephemeral. When Will Green speaks to him of the morrow's expedition, the narrator expresses his agreement, but his eye catches that of the old rebel priest, and the "half smile" of the latter fills his heart with foreboding.<sup>50</sup> At the end of his long and dramatic conversation with John Ball in the old chapel, he would still like to discuss many things and feels oppressed by time: if he hesitates it will be too late.<sup>51</sup>

This anxiety reaches its climax in *News from Nowhere* for a variety of reasons. The anguish of being parted from the vision is inextricably linked with the feeling of not being integrated into the new world. Throughout the narrative, the visitor remains "the man from another planet", and this people from the days to come remains for him "this strange people". The questions and answers

between one side and the other remain "puzzling".<sup>52</sup> When exploring the mediaeval past with John Ball, Morris did not feel this sense of being historically lost in any way: it was a past he loved, that he had studied at length, in which all his culture was steeped and which was more familiar and more welcoming to him than was the Victorian age. But in this world of the twenty-second century, despite his own enthusiasm and confidence, an abrupt gap exists between his yearning for happiness and the achievement of happiness. Despite his hatred of "civilization", the new ways of feeling, of thinking and of living, which he has imagined for himself, which are the objective of his quest and of his struggle, disturb him mightily, and, lost in the historical perspective, he suddenly discovers that he is a Victorian in his habits and reactions. He clings to old Hammond, who knows the nineteenth century so well, for the young people, despite their kindness, can only regard him with astonishment and curiosity.<sup>53</sup> Constrained, in order to communicate with his new companions, to cast off all his habits of thought and normal behaviour, he feels chilled by this new world, and only the presence of old Hammond provides the warmth he needs.<sup>54</sup> What is more, this uneasy feeling is reciprocated. After the long conversation between the old man and his visitor, Dick and Clara return in search of their guest, and the young woman (who, nevertheless, is the person in the narrative showing the most critical and rational attitude of mind) is suddenly overcome by the atmosphere: "Kinsman, I don't like this: something or another troubles me, and I feel as if something untoward were going to happen. You have been talking of past miseries to the guest, and have been living in past unhappy times, and it is in the air all round us, and makes us feel as if we were longing for something that we cannot have."<sup>55</sup> Such a longing, in this world of happiness, could obviously only be suffering. Kindly and placid Dick himself is sometimes uneasy at the visitor's utterances: "... 'I should have thought ... that you had thrown a kind of evil charm over me. Now, you know,' said he, suddenly, 'that's only a joke so you mustn't take it to heart.' - 'All right,' said I; 'I don't.' Yet I did feel somewhat uneasy at his words, after all."<sup>56</sup>

Despite this uneasiness, which gradually lessens, Morris experiences deep joy at this vision of the new society, but the dread of the inevitable separation is mingled with the joy. It is inspired by Dick's innocent pleasantries: "... I was half suspecting ... that you would presently be vanishing away from us, and began to picture my kinsman sitting in the hall staring at nothing and finding that he had been talking a while past to nobody."<sup>57</sup> Later, during the journey to Runnymede, Dick and Clara amuse themselves by imagining their hosts (Ellen and her father) and themselves as characters in a fairy tale, and Dick says to the visitor: "... 'You had better consider that you have got the cap of darkness, and are seeing everything, yourself invisible.' - That touched me on my weak side of not feeling sure of my position in this beautiful new country."<sup>58</sup> But he has no need of these unintentional hints to feel the burning question in the depths of his heart. He cannot go to sleep without wondering where he will wake up next day.<sup>59</sup> Finding Ellen makes this idea the more distressing. The girl, like John Ball before her, has guessed his secret; she thinks that he will not stay, and he is overwhelmed when she speaks of it in scarcely veiled terms.<sup>60</sup> From that moment he cannot leave her without wondering whether he will see her again.<sup>61</sup> At times this obsession takes

another form. At the end of their wonderful journey up the Thames, Dick and Clara and their guest arrive at Kelmscott and are welcomed by a crowd of gay and ardent friends, gathered together for the hay-making; and suddenly Morris wonders: "There I stood in a dreamy mood, and rubbed my eyes as if I were not wholly awake, and half expected to see the gay-clad company of beautiful men and women change to two or three spindle-legged back-bowed men and haggard, hollow-eyed, ill-favoured women, who once wore down the soil of this land with their heavy hopeless feet, from day to day, and season to season, and year to year".<sup>62</sup> And the final episode is one of the most full of pathos that Morris ever wrote. He arrives at the harvest feast in the church, but his companions have ceased to see him. In vain he tries to attract the eyes of Dick and Clara, he has become invisible to them.

"I turned to Ellen, and she *did* seem to recognise me for an instant, but her bright face turned sad directly, and she shook her head with a mournful look, and the next moment all consciousness of my presence had faded from her face."<sup>63</sup>

Flight, nightmare, and the sinister reawakening in Hammersmith . . . This long anguish, inextricably mingled with the inspiring spectacle of future happiness, gives the vision heightened relief and a human warmth one finds nowhere else: most other utopias are intellectual exercises, learned geometry to be read with curiosity, but not productive of any emotion.<sup>64</sup> Morris's originality and genius lie in his making the vision live for us because he has lived it himself.

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A love of happiness, robust optimism, visionary gift, these then are Morris's subjective motivations for utopia. Would they, by themselves, have been decisive? To put the question and to attempt to answer it affirmatively is probably unrealistic: it would, once again, be to disregard wilfully the part of reason in the poet's actions. Few writers have had such distaste for purposeless creation, few among them have given so much thought to their intentions and fixed an aim to their writings. If he took to utopia, it was not simply an account of some predisposition or spontaneous urge, it was of deliberate purpose and because he judged it necessary. After all, he explained it at length over fifteen years of life as a militant, in his articles, his letters, his lectures, even in his utopian writings, which become incomprehensible if one tries to detach them from his political activity, as most critics do. Not only are they not detachable from it, they are an integral part of it.

Is *A Dream of John Ball* to be regarded as nothing more than a mediaeval illumination? In an article published in 1933, Owen Carroll relates that in 1894 he suggested that Morris make a play of it. The poet replied: "I am not of the timber from which play-wrights are hewn. Why not have a try at it yourself? . . . When I wrote my little book, I did it with the intention of bringing in the Socialist dialogues at the end rather than dealing with the literary and dramatic side of the story".<sup>65</sup>

As for *News from Nowhere* a "jeu d'esprit – a fancy picture, or idyll, or romance", according to Glasier,<sup>66</sup> "romantic pastorale" according to



Mackail,<sup>67</sup> “holiday republic” according to Monsieur Victor Dupont<sup>68</sup> (and that is but a brief sampling).<sup>69</sup> What does Morris himself think? In an incompletely dated letter, which must, in Philip Henderson’s opinion, have been written on 22 December 1890, Morris, declining journalistic requests from Hyndman, gives as his reason that he has too much work on hand, “including two works more or less propagandist; to wit my *News from Nowhere* and the book that I have been working at with Bax which I am going at last to tackle”.<sup>70</sup> In all probability he was referring to the book publication of the novel and to the preparation of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*. Is it not noteworthy that he puts his utopian tale and his theoretical handbook into the same category? One other pointer is not without interest. He, who in general was little concerned over the success of his literary productions, in February 1890 (when the serial production had barely begun a month earlier) was preparing a cheap book edition: “I shall print the *News from Nowhere* in a book for 1/- or perhaps 6d.”<sup>71</sup> In October, a few days after *Commonweal* had completed the serialisation, a letter to Bruce Glasier shows him possessed of the same idea. “I shall now presently begin to touch up *News from Nowhere* for its book form, and will publish it for 1s. It has amused me very much writing it: but you may depend upon it, it won’t sell. This of course is my own fault – or my own misfortune.”<sup>72</sup> We are sufficiently used to Morris’s understatements to understand what he means by, “It has amused me very much.” This concern with its reaching a wide public is significant. He seems delighted to announce to Glasier the appearance of an American edition.<sup>73</sup> He authorised the German translation by “someone recommended by the party” and urged Andreas Scheu to undertake that of *A Dream of John Ball*.<sup>74</sup> Morris’s letters never at any time show such concern over the circulation of his books and there seems little doubt that this interest was inspired by the propagandist character which he attributed to his utopian tales. *News from Nowhere* was, clearly, very close to his heart and he did not hide his pleasure when Scawen Blunt told him that both he and his wife had read it. Some piquancy is added to Scawen Blunt’s record of the fact by his relating, two pages further on, that Morris read several of his poems with a very ill grace “as if he were throwing a bone to a dog”.<sup>75</sup> It was certainly with more conviction and with deliberately propagandist and educative purpose that he read out fragments from his story at the Sunday socialist meetings at Hammersmith.<sup>76</sup>

William Morris expressly declares that he considered *News from Nowhere* as a political act, in the course of the narrative itself, in words loaded with significance. Let us turn to the strange episode following the visitor’s conversation with old Hammond at the British Museum. The atmosphere is tense. Clara feels the sadness and horror of centuries of human unhappiness hanging in the air. Dick tries to joke and declares that he had wondered whether their guest had “vanished into another world” and whether he would find his great-grandfather talking to an empty chair. But the old man chuckled and said:

“Don’t be afraid, Dick. In any case, I have not been talking to thin air; nor, indeed, to this new friend of ours only. Who knows but I may not have been talking to many people? For perhaps our guest may some day go back to the people he has come from, and may take a message from us

which may bear fruit for them, *and consequently for us.*" (My italics – P.M.)<sup>77</sup>

So the book carries a message, and a message which is not purely educational. It clearly appears that in Morris's mind utopia serves to move people to act, and, no less clearly, that he finally rejects fatalism and spontaneity. He believes with Marx that, although the course of history is irreversible, men must make their own history. But there is more: in these lines heavy with significance, Morris shows us that, while the future is determined by the actions of men in the present, the vision of the future, in its turn, determines the actions of the men of today.

I note briefly here (because there is material for a long study which would go beyond the framework I have set) that *News from Nowhere* was understood as a political message by Morris's contemporaries. The very anti-socialist Mackail, who himself refused to see anything more in it than a "romantic pastorate" shocking in its "slightness and fantasy", is obliged to record that no other book of the poet's did more to spread his reputation as a socialist.<sup>78</sup> The much fuller evidence of Edward Carpenter moves in the same direction and expresses great enthusiasm.<sup>79</sup> G.D.H. Cole many times declared that reading *News from Nowhere* converted him to socialism.<sup>80</sup> But it would be wrong to think that Morris's influence was felt only in intellectual circles. It reached an appreciable fraction of the working class. Bruce Glasier describes the warm welcome which the poet experienced in Glasgow and recounts that a working man told him that "I no longer doubt the possibility of an earthly paradise".<sup>81</sup> Morris's writings were successfully used in people's movements in Ireland,<sup>82</sup> and in England itself it would be impossible to exaggerate the decisive rôle of William Morris in the formation of a militant like Tom Mann.<sup>83</sup>

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What reasons led Morris to choose utopia as a means of expression and propaganda? They are many, ranging from the most general considerations to the most exact political interests.

Obviously it is the first of these that we shall find at the beginning of his political life, and they are very varied.

"For as life can have no pleasure without *memory*," he wrote in 1880 or 1881, "so it can have no honour and no use without foresight."<sup>84</sup>

It is a matter of dignity, which is also a necessity of our daily life. Only the glow of the peace of days to come can help us endure the tumult and difficulties of our existence<sup>85</sup> and this need cannot but grow as the corruption and decadence of a civilisation strengthen the desire for a better life: hope then plumbs the future.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, progress has been made, the working class is emerging from its long apathy, it is succeeding through demands and struggle to improve its existence, but all these promises would become illusions and lies if we did not have a high ideal before us.<sup>87</sup> It is this very progress which must stimulate and develop man's aspirations.<sup>88</sup> And, he says later, should this ideal not normally take shape in our minds from the moment we decide to believe in the regeneration of the world? Is that not a logical consequence?<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the meagre progress recorded, the lot of the working class is wretched; its poverty is so deep and brutalising "... that they are not and cannot be fully conscious of the extent of the loss which they and the whole world suffer as a consequence, since they cannot see and feel the better life that they have not lived".<sup>90</sup> So it is essential to set before it an ideal which will breed and stimulate discontent, and become the "incarnation" of it.<sup>91</sup> "Yet it must be remembered", insists Morris in 1896, "that civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him".<sup>92</sup> In this way dream and visionary imagination take on political functions. Such a conception of art had long possessed Morris's mind. As early as 1881, perhaps in less concise terms, but nevertheless foreshadowing all his later work, he wrote:

"For I suppose the best art to be the pictured representation of men's imaginings . . . stories that tell of men's aspirations for more than the material life can give them, their struggles for the future welfare of their race, their unselfish love, their unrequited service: things like this are the subjects for the best art; in such subjects there is hope surely, yet the aspect of them is likely to be sorrowful enough: defeat the seed of victory, and death the seed of life, will be shown on the face of most of them." <sup>93</sup>

Such a thought contains in germ *A Dream of John Ball*, while the declaration of 1896 justifies and explains *a posteriori* the utopia of *News from Nowhere*.

So the vision of utopia is necessary for the working class to become conscious of its lot. Equally, or even more, it is a mobilising influence. "The Socialism which we can foresee," writes Morris in the conclusion of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, "and which promises to us the elevation of mankind to a level of intelligent happiness and pleasurable energy unattained as yet, is to us enough as an ideal for our aspirations and as an incentive to our action".<sup>94</sup> If men would "... try to think of the life you might live and would naturally live if you were not forced into misery by your masters, . . . then I do not think you can help combining together to tell the world that you must be free and happy: and then all will soon be won".<sup>95</sup> It is the vision of this better life that alone can give to the struggle the taste of hope without which courage falters: "Go back and be the happier for having seen us," Ellen seems to say with her last look to the visitor, "for having added a little hope to your struggle." <sup>96</sup>

"Do not let us fix our standard of endeavour by the misery which has been but rather by the happiness that might be." <sup>97</sup> "I think it of great importance to put the highest ideal before them, so as to encourage them to the utmost." <sup>98</sup> More: "... it is essential that the ideal of the new society should be always kept before the eyes of the working classes, lest the *continuity* of the demands of the people should be broken, or lest they should be misdirected".<sup>99</sup> When Morris expressed that opinion, at that moment (1893), he was clearly thinking of Fabian opportunism and anarchist phraseology. Finally, "We socialists are often reproached with giving no details of the state of things which would follow on the destruction of that system of waste and war which is sometimes dignified with the lying title of the harmonious combination of capital and labour. Many worthy people say: 'We admit that the present system has



produced unsatisfactory results, but at least it is a system . . . ' ' ' .<sup>100</sup> So we must be able to show these people that another solution does exist, and that it is to be preferred. Not for nothing does John Drinkwater describe William Morris as a "practical utopist".<sup>101</sup>

Things are not, in truth, all that simple. While Morris sees in the contrast provided by utopia a means of making the workers conscious of their misery, it is essential at the same time that material need should drive them to struggle. The future depends upon them, but they can only imagine the beauty of this future from the moment they begin to move. Otherwise, the most enthusiastic prophecies are nothing but abstract propositions to them.<sup>102</sup> So our poet does not in any way get lost in the mists of moralising idealism nor for a moment deny the decisive rôle, in the last analysis, of economic reality.

So Morris had to face up to a difficult problem: that of making a dialectical unity between didactic utopism and militant action. He had founded the Socialist League as a reaction against the political opportunism of Hyndman; within the League, he fought against the parliamentarianism of the Aveling group, and, outside it, against the socialism without perspective of the Fabians. He felt an impelling need to lay stress upon the necessity of never losing sight of the goal to be achieved, and he tended to make this the central theme of his written and spoken propaganda. But at the same time, with tireless devotion, he took on the dreary chores of day-to-day activity, and was careful not to underrate them. In this same year of 1886, in a lecture justly called *The End and the Means*, he posed the problem and indicated the solution:

"It is good, however much we may plume ourselves on our practicality, that is, I suppose, on our setting out towards an end which we are likely to attain, to set before us the actual end at which we aim. It is true that it is the custom of *very* practical people to taunt those whose end is or seems to be a long way off with being idealists; nevertheless I venture to think that without these idealists practical people would be in a much worse plight than they now are; they would have but a dull history of the past, a poor life in the present, and no hope for the future; on the other hand the idealists in their turn would make a great mistake if they were, in their vision of better things, to despise the 'practical people', even the narrowest of them. Indeed so much of the necessary work of progress is so dull and discouraging that it requires people of somewhat blunted sensibilities to carry it out, and even perhaps people shortsighted to the verge of blindness. Yet again it is not a good thing to be blind or blunt; and moreover there are doubtless some people who are sensitive enough, apt to be discouraged by the roughness, incompleteness and dullness of their fellows who are not necessarily far-sighted or steady as to the end to be reached through all this weary struggle: if any of these can be shown the glorious end and made to feel it in their hearts, will it not transfigure for them that dullness and weariness aforesaid, change its relative proportions, at least make it seem small and easy to bear? Nay enduring steadiness of purpose is surely impossible without some high ideal to aim at, nor will a wise man consent to take pains and trouble, to sacrifice his leisure or his pleasure unless he can see and feel that he has set before him something worthy of all that sacrifice."<sup>103</sup>

Unfortunately, this picture only appears to maintain a balance between militant action day by day and propaganda through utopia. While Morris demonstrates in convincing words that the latter can only enrich the former, he is content to restore the balance by inviting the "idealists" not to despise those who perform the lowly tasks of the struggle and to give them the means of finding joy in their sacrifice. At this time he did not feel the need to show as well that the lessons drawn from militant activity are essential to the fabrication of a vision of the future. He was, in fact, then entering the acute stage of his anti-parliamentarian period, and the tendency showing in this 1886 lecture was not slow to harden. The tone of his articles in *Commonweal* became more violent. In 1888, the practicality of some socialists became unbearable to him. He refrained from accusing them of dishonesty: "I do not mean to say that those onesided Socialists are generally acting disingenuously, or merely trying to smooth down a hostile audience. I believe, on the contrary, that they do not see except through the murky smoked glass of the present condition of life amongst us; and it seems somewhat strange, not that they should have no vision of the future, but that they should not be ready to admit that it is their own defect that they have not."<sup>104</sup>

But this time he went too far. In the next week, letters flooded into the *Commonweal* office protesting against his excess. A particularly interesting letter is that of the trade unionist T. Binning, to which I referred earlier,<sup>105</sup> which not only denounces, without any beating around the bush, the bourgeois roots of Morris's utopism, but links it with religious obscurantism:

"The workers have been told by those whose function it is to administer spiritual consolation, that their privations in this life will be compensated in heaven; and it seems to me to be pretty much the same thing to ask them to forego an advantage within their grasp for the promise of a beatific state of society in the indefinite future."<sup>106</sup>

The attack was well directed in so far as its target was Morris's anti-parliamentarianism, but was not justified in respect of his utopism, which he never ceased to regard as an essential element in mobilising the masses. It is highly probable that for several months this discussion perturbed the council of the League, because in June *Commonweal* published a declaration, signed by the majority of its members, a better balanced declaration, obviously drawn up by Morris, but which shows the predominance of his viewpoint:

"As to the means for the attainment of the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, and through that to the equality of condition for all persons, the League believes that the first and most indispensable of such means is the putting before the people its aims, ultimate and immediate, plainly and honestly, and has always acted on that belief; in the confidence that however strange these aims may be to the greater number of persons, the time will come when circumstances will force the workers to accept them as their own, and that it is no waste of energy meantime to familiarise them with these aims and thereby to quicken their desires and give something for their intelligence to seize hold of, and for their hope to feed on. The education of the vague discontent which (happily) is now so prevalent among the workers into a

definite aim, is the chief business of the Socialist League; nor can this work ever be dispensed with even on the very eve of the first and obvious steps towards revolution.”<sup>107</sup>

This declaration is very significant. It implicitly defines the position of withdrawal adopted by the socialist movement after the set-back of “Bloody Sunday”; it supports the idea dear to Morris that the main activity of the movement must be educative, aimed at “making socialists”, and it justifies his didactic and mobilising utopism. The last sentence of this passage demands our notice. When we reread the chapter in *News from Nowhere* in which old Hammond relates the vicissitudes of the “change”, we note that in the middle of the revolutionary crisis, when reaction at bay is hoping for and expecting a provocative manifesto to provide the pretext for armed suppression, the socialist press is content to publish “educational articles” which “came upon the public with a kind of May-Day freshness”<sup>108</sup>

The discussion which filled the columns of *Commonweal* and went on in the council of the League bore fruit, nonetheless. Morris was distinctly more moderate in his lecture on equality in September:

“It is usual when a Socialist is addressing an audience of those who wish to know what his socialism means, to touch lightly on the aim that Socialism has in view and to dwell chiefly on the means by which that aim is to be reached. The speaker assumes (usually I am glad to think within reason) that his audience are sufficiently with him to sympathize with his wish to better the present condition of affairs, and are eager to know what process he proposes to them as the means for the bettering of the life of the great mass of the population; it is natural for people to say to an earnest reformer, tell us what it is that you wish to have done at once and then we will look at the matter; and all the more natural perhaps when the aim of the speaker is far-reaching and all inclusive, when in fact he is preaching a change in the basis of society and not a mere palliation of its worst evils: because people say, and reasonably, we cannot be expected to change that basis suddenly, to go to sleep on Saturday night in our present condition and wake up on Monday morning with the revolution accomplished and everything going smoothly with a contented population round about us. There must be a long period of half-formed aspirations, abortive schemes, doubtful experiments and half and half measures, interspersed with disappointment, reaction, and apathy before we get anywhere near the beginning of the obvious and dramatic change which people know as revolution, and it is a matter of course that people should ask the would-be revolutionists what their first step is to be, and that Socialist lecturers generally spend a great part of their lecturing time in showing what the first step *may* be and hold keen argument about it with their audiences.

You cannot however fail to agree with me when I say that not even the first step can be taken until the advocates of a complete change have managed to persuade a sufficient number of people that it is necessary, and should be a change of a certain kind.”<sup>109</sup>



The moderation he imposed upon himself did not, it is plain, in any way diminish his faith in the need for utopia, and, in the following year, a few months before the publication of the first instalments of *News from Nowhere*, he declared in a lecture, the text of which is in Amsterdam, that socialists should get together from time to time to discuss their ideal: "... To come sometimes from out of the hedge of party formulas and show each other our real desires and hopes ought to be something of a safeguard against the danger of pedantry which besets the intellectual side of the Socialist movement and the danger of machine politics which besets its practical and work-a-day side".<sup>110</sup>

The constant concern to link theory intimately with practice led William Morris to be even more explicit over the purpose of his utopia. While, in fact, it is intended to rouse the reader and move him to participate in the action which is to lead to the establishment of the wonderful new society of the future, it is also intended to give him the taste for undertaking theoretical study. "... This guessing, these hopes, or if you will, these dreams for the future, make many a man a Socialist whom sober reason deduced from science and political economy and the selection of the fittest would not move at all. They put a man in a fit frame of mind to study the reasons for his hope; give him courage to wade through studies, which, as the Arab king said of arithmetic, would otherwise be too dull for the mind of a man to think of." <sup>111</sup>

But this is not the end of Morris's concern for "teaching them as it were by the future and forming the habits of social life without which any scheme of Socialism is but the mill-wheel without the motive power ... let us begin to work against the counter-revolution, by being sure that we who call ourselves Socialists understand what we are aiming at, and should feel at home in our new country when we get there – we and all that we lead into the new country".<sup>112</sup>

So, for Morris, utopia constituted a deliberate choice dictated by many essentially practical and objective reasons. It was not an intellectual or fantasising game. Nor was it even in any way what Raymond Ruyer calls, in a definition far too general to be applied to Morris's utopia, a "mental exercise upon lateral possibilities".<sup>113</sup> It was the responsible act of a political leader who happened also to be a great poet. It did not depict a possibility, but a certainty, and it has the fervour of an act of faith.

Such an act of faith was not without daring at the end of last century. The existence, in our twentieth century, of a growing number of socialist states will continue to arouse enthusiasm in some and hostility in others. But they are a real fact, which no one any longer regards with stupefaction or incredulity. It was not in any way so during William Morris's lifetime. The experience of the Paris Commune had been too brief for its achievements to have been any more than outlines, and their meaning and extent escaped the great mass of people. Its tragic end tended to give it the appearance of a hopeless endeavour, naturally doomed to failure. Socialist doctrines were many and contradictory, and many of them totally lacked scientific consistency. The phraseology of anarchism encouraged confusion and bestowed upon revolutionaries the romantic or horrifying features of desperate conspirators, whilst Fabian opportunism was deliberately hostile to all idea of revolution.

Morris was addressing himself to audiences who had to be brought to admit

that the future institutions of socialism were anything other than "fantastic and impossible schemes".<sup>114</sup> One recalls the altercation in the course of which the Rev. J. Page Hopps declared to the poet:

"That's an impossible dream of yours, Mr. Morris, such a society would need God Almighty himself to manage it."<sup>115</sup>

Impossible, that is the word that cropped up unfailingly and was the major argument of all opposition: the majority of socialists, theoretically poorly educated and not then being able to point to the evidence of history, found it very difficult to meet. In a novel published in 1912, *Marriage*, H. G. Wells describes this state of mind in so typical a fashion that I feel impelled to refer to it. In this book we see a young scholar, who has become a company director, arguing with his technical assistant, a self-educated socialist, bitter and aggressive, and he asks him:

"Tell me how to organise things better."

"Much you'd care. They'll organise themselves . . . Then you'll see."

"Then what's going to happen?"

"Overthrow. And social democracy."

"How is that going to work?"

David had been cornered by that before. "I don't care if it *doesn't* work," he snarled, "so long as we smash this."<sup>116</sup>

Such were the men whom William Morris was addressing. If David had read *News from Nowhere*, perhaps his reply would have been different. In writing his book, Morris wanted to give these men of good will the chance of being something other than sour, to offer them a reason for living and fighting and, above all, to force upon them the conviction that not only was victory possible, but that its morrows would be triumphant: "We have proved it true!" exclaims Ellen.<sup>117</sup>

In 1919, the American journalist Lincoln Steffens went to Russia with William C. Bullitt, then a young official of the State Department and special envoy of President Wilson. On his return, he uttered these words, which have become famous: "I have seen the future, and it works!"<sup>118</sup>

In order to prove to his readers that a socialist society could "work", William Morris had no other recourse than utopia.

### CHAPTER THREE

## *Socialism – The Two Stages*

From 1883, after his impassioned reading of *Capital*, William Morris's choice was final.

"This present society, or age of shoddy," he wrote to William Allingham, "is doomed to fall: nor can I see anything ahead of it as an organization save Socialism."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, the solution of a return to barbarism continued to cast an intermittent spell over his mind, even beyond its dialectical absorption into the "parable" of 1884. Also, in these first months of enthusiasm, he wanted to avoid committing himself to unduly emphatic declarations, as for example in writing to C. E. Maurice: "Also of course I do not believe in the world being saved by any system, – I only assert the necessity of attacking systems grown corrupt, and no longer leading anywhither."<sup>2</sup> But that is nothing but a stylistic rider intended to coax a possible sympathiser whom Morris was trying in vain to attract into the Democratic Federation, and it is possibly the only reservation of this kind to be found anywhere in his writings. It was almost with a note of defiance that in October of the same year 1883, when asked by Charles Rowley to take part in lecturing at Ancoats, he warned him that he was "an open declared Socialist, or, to be more specific, Collectivist", and that any lecture he delivered would reflect his opinions.<sup>3</sup> Right up to his death in 1896 William Morris was to reiterate this declaration of faith under all circumstances.

But what, to him, was socialism? Once again, and it will not be the last time, it is necessary to reject firmly the opinions of numberless commentators and critics who wish to find nothing but sentimental and poetic dreaming in his utopia. But he cannot be accused of having veiled his thoughts: few writers have been so explicit, so direct, so inimical to any concealment or, I may add, so materialistic in their beliefs. The four letters written in 1888 to Rev. George Bainton constitute an essential document in this respect. They were composed with care, show sustained thought, and every word is weighed. Right at the beginning of the first letter, a key phrase stands out, a deliberately concise phrase, of which the whole argument will be the logical development: "The foundation of socialism is economical".<sup>4</sup> How many more times shall we see this idea, sometimes expressed calmly, sometimes shouted indignantly! With what disdain, for example, does he trounce those who endeavour to put the question of the future of art and culture before the "knife-and-fork" question: such a one, he declares "does not understand what art means".<sup>5</sup>

There is not (and why should this judgment be regarded as pejorative?)



anything strictly original in the definition formulated by Morris of the production relationships in a collectivist society. It conforms to the strictest Marxist orthodoxy, without addition or omission. The first measure to be taken by the socialists will be “the abolition of the private ownership in the means of production”<sup>6</sup> and the taking over, “for the whole people, duly organized, of possession and control of all the means of production and exchange”.<sup>7</sup> Such was the programme of the Socialist League, formulated in its Manifesto of 1885:

“... the land, the capital, the machinery, factories, workshops, stores, means of transit, mines, banking, all means of production and distribution of wealth, must be declared and treated as the common property of all.”<sup>8</sup>

Note again, in passing, that the simple nationalisation of the land, considered as the panacea by Henry George, has long since ceased to satisfy Morris: his list is practically exhaustive and includes all aspects of capitalist property. Brief or detailed lists are to be found in the majority of his political writings. The one in the first letter to Rev. George Bainton, already mentioned, has the interest of being accompanied by a particularly important stipulation: “... the land, factories, machinery, means of transit, and whatever wealth of any sort is used for the reproduction of wealth, and which therefore is necessary to labour and can only be *used* by it, must be *owned* by the nation only, to be *used* by the workers ... according to their capacity”,<sup>9</sup> which defines the nature of the community plainly and distinctly. Morris insists, in a note appended to his letter, upon the distinction to be made between ownership and use, a distinction which was not new in his mind and had already been sketched out in a lecture in 1884.<sup>10</sup>

This fundamental imperative for any socialist revolution, this radical transformation in the basis of society, is continually reiterated by William Morris, and it would be wearisome to draw up here a long catalogue of quotations, all similar in spirit and even in form.<sup>11</sup> It is extremely significant that Morris considers the collectivisation of the means of production and exchange as a minimum programme. It is, he says, “the least that the party can accept as terms of peace with the capitalists”; and, he remarks aggressively of this primary revolutionary measure,

“all minor reforms of civilization which have been thought of or would be possible to think of would be included in it”.<sup>12</sup>

His declaration of principle is the more peremptory in that its point is turned against reformist ideologies.

“I must add, further,” he declares in a lecture, that no programme is worthy the acceptance of the working classes that stops short of the abolition of private property in the means of production. Any other programme is misleading and dishonest.”<sup>13</sup>

It is necessary to keep this fundamental theoretical position in mind in order to appreciate fully Morris’s poetical outpourings and to feel their quality and intensity. It is a very conscious utopia which foresees the days when “all *mine* and all *thine* shall be *ours*, and no more shall any man crave for riches that serve

for nothing but to fetter a friend for a slave".<sup>14</sup> Then there will be no more of "the 'rights of property', which means clenching the fist on a piece of goods and crying out to the neighbours, You shan't have this!"<sup>15</sup> In that time, declares John Ball,

"... shall no man mow the deep grass for another, while his own kine lack cow-meat; and he that soweth shall reap, and the reaper shall eat in fellowship the harvest that in fellowship he hath won".<sup>16</sup>

\* \* \*

The evident corollary of the collective appropriation of the means of production and exchange is, in fact, the establishment of a classless society. There again, Morris faithfully follows the teaching of Marx and Engels.<sup>17</sup> It must be admitted that his line wavers slightly in the early moments of his political thinking, and one can find traces of idealism in it. The revolution, as he then conceives it, is one

"which, by abolishing men's power of making a profit from their fellows' labour will abolish all classes: not the mere arbitrary distinction between lord and commoner, gentleman and worker, but the real and dreadful distinction between rich man and poor, between the cultivated and the ignorant, between the refined and the brutal, which now exists and is the foundation of plutocratic society."<sup>18</sup>

This formulation is not without interest: in a very striking way it marks the transition from the influence of the Ruskin of *The Stones of Venice* to the Marx of *Capital*, and tries to reconcile in one sentence two conceptions which have radically different points of departure. I have no other reason for paying it any attention, because it represents only a very brief moment in Morris's thinking: his writing immediately afterwards shows rigorous ideological firmness. In a lecture given in that same year of 1883, the terms he uses are quite free from any ambiguity: he observes in the working class

"a spirit of association founded on the antagonism which has produced all former changes in the condition of men, and which will one day abolish all classes and take definite and practical form".<sup>19</sup>

Pernickety materialists may perhaps regret that Morris often substitutes for "classless society" the more vague and abstract term of "society of equality". It cannot be doubted that the frequent use of the words justice and equality carries the mark of idealistic hangovers, and it is well known how much these abstractions offended Marx.<sup>20</sup> In any case one could not attribute any influence to Ruskin in this connection, given the repulsion he felt for egalitarian ideas, and perhaps one should regard this usage as reminiscent of Babeuf. Anyway, undue severity would be excessive: did not Engels himself write that

"the real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the abolition of classes"?<sup>21</sup>

Such criticism is the less well founded because while Morris does have

recourse to the abstract concept of equality, it always remains a synonym for “a new society in which classes shall have ceased to exist”,<sup>22</sup> and this latter formulation, precise and definite, is just as frequent. Even when he speaks of equality, the sense he gives to the word is the more clear because it is used uncompromisingly:

“I call myself a Communist, and have no wish to qualify that word by joining any other to it. The aim of Communism seems to me to be the complete equality of condition for all people; and anything in a Socialist direction which stops short of this is merely a compromise with the present condition of society, a halting-place on the road to the goal.”<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, it is possible, at first glance, to find hesitations, a contradiction indeed, in Morris’s vision of the establishment of the classless society. In fact, in 1884 he wrote:

“... the upper, middle, and lower classes shall have melted into one class, living contentedly a simple and happy life.”<sup>24</sup>

This formulation is worth pausing over for a moment. It shows without any doubt the confidence Morris still had in the possible regeneration of his own class within communist society, and this is an aspect we shall examine more closely when we study the transformation of man in Morris’s utopia.<sup>25</sup> I must add (and the tense he uses makes this plain) that the picture he draws has its context in the second stage of the new society (a concept we shall tackle shortly) and not in the period immediately following the revolutionary crisis. These details are necessary, for the reader might be tempted to believe that Morris is implicitly denying the leading rôle of the working class in the process of abolishing social classes. But nothing is further from his thoughts. In a letter written a few months later to William Allingham, he writes that when the workers have realised that they form “the only organic part of society . . . they will abolish all other classes and become themselves the State”.<sup>26</sup>

One is struck by how closely Morris repeats the very words of the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels:

“... the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation”.<sup>27</sup>

Morris goes even further and sees in the obligation to work, which will be the law of the new world, the factor which will assimilate all society into the working class:

“I have already said that all must work therefore the workmen means the whole of society; there should be no society outside those who work to sustain society.”<sup>28</sup>

There will no longer, in fact, be any “non-producing class, the organized workers will be the whole community”.<sup>29</sup> “They will be society,” he repeats, “they will be the community”, and there will be “no class outside them to contend with”.<sup>30</sup> There will henceforth be one homogeneous class, ennobled by its new conditions of existence; the dregs will have disappeared; there will no longer be any “criminal classes”.<sup>31</sup>



The class struggle, this long war which is the motive force of history, will one day end in peace, but "... that war must go on till the great change comes whose end is peace and not war",<sup>32</sup> when all classes are abolished.<sup>33</sup> Morris addresses himself in particular to the young, and tries to make them understand the close link which exists between the class struggle and the classless society:

"It is most important that young Socialists should have this fact of the class-war always before them. It explains past history, and in the present gives us the only solid hope for the future. And it must be understood that it is only by the due working out of this class-war to its end, *the abolition of classes*, that Socialism can come about."<sup>34</sup>

The vision of a classless society should provide a major stimulus to the class struggle. Utopia, as we saw in the last chapter, seeks to answer the difficult question of the time: "How will it work?", and so to give reasoned confidence to militants. In the event, it replies to a more definite and, at that time, no less current objection: will production be efficient or even possible without the experience of the present class of owners of industry? William Morris does not totally deny the validity of this objection, at least as far as the first steps are concerned, but he reaffirms his faith in the potentialities of the working class:

"If ... the wealth-owners were to disappear, production of wealth would at the worst be only hindered for awhile, and probably go on pretty much as it does now."

Just imagine, on the other hand, what would happen if it were the "so-called lower class" which were to disappear. Then the production of wealth would be totally halted

"until the wealth-owners had learned how to produce, until they had descended from their position, and taken the place of their former slaves".<sup>35</sup>

Morris finds confirmation of this uselessness of the employing class in certain nineteenth-century experiments. The only merit Morris will allow to the co-operative movement and its "incomplete experiments" is that it has proved in advance that

"the existence of a privileged class is by no means necessary for the production of wealth".<sup>36</sup>

The classless society is thus not only desirable but possible in practice. So it is necessary for the workers to assert immediately "their true position of being themselves society":

"they themselves can regulate labour, and by being absolute masters of their material, tools, and time can win for themselves all that it is possible to be won from nature without deduction or taxation paid to classes that have no purpose or reason for existence".<sup>37</sup>

"The workman must learn to understand that he must have no master, no employer save himself – himself collectively, that is to say, the commonweal."<sup>38</sup>

Such should be the aim of the class struggle, and this struggle is to be carried on with vigilance and perseverance until its final outcome. "Let us . . . take care," says Morris, "that our present struggle leaves behind it no class distinction, but brings about one condition of equality for all."<sup>39</sup> Alongside this desire to see the final disappearance of all survivals from the past, Morris has a worry, which he touches upon several times, that of seeing inequality reappear in another form:

"But will there be any new class to take the place of the present proletariat when that has triumphed, as it must do, over the present privileged class? We cannot foresee the future, but we may fairly hope not: at least we cannot see any signs of such a new class forming. It is impossible to see how destruction of privilege can stop short of absolute equality of condition."<sup>40</sup>

But it is a passing preoccupation. He refuses to believe in such an eventuality:

"I believe . . . that after that the class struggle, now thousands of years old, having come to an end, no new class will arise to dominate the workers".<sup>41</sup>

Such a risk, however, would exist if the new society were not to pass beyond its first stage, that of State Socialism, establishing the new order by force, and remaining content with bringing the means of production into common ownership, while the resulting wealth remained private property: "it would lead us back again", he said, "into a new form of class society".<sup>42</sup> Such constraint, based upon a hierarchy of abilities, would, as it went on, keep such-and-such a useful producer in a state of inferiority compared with such-and-such another useful producer, and "you at once have your privileged classes again".<sup>43</sup> However, William Morris is convinced that such a situation can and must only be temporary and that the abundance attained will allow of passing to the second stage, that of complete communism, embracing distribution as well as production. At this stage, all danger of a recurrence of classes would be finally avoided.<sup>44</sup> But here we are coming on to new concepts which must be clarified and precisely defined.

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"He lived in no fool's paradise as to the future," writes May Morris, "and sometimes spoke to those about him with a patient and friendly kind of wonder of the men who believed in the immediate advent of the Social Revolution, settling on the morrow into a Socialist scheme of things full blown and in working order."<sup>45</sup>

Such illusions were more widespread than we can easily imagine today, and the evidence of Bernard Shaw is interesting in this respect:

"I remember being asked satirically and publicly at that time how long it would take to get Socialism into working order if I had my way. I replied, with a spirited modesty, that a fortnight would be ample for the

purpose. When I add that I was frequently complimented on being one of the more reasonable Socialists, you will be able to appreciate the fervour of our conviction, and the extravagant levity of our practical ideas."<sup>46</sup>

How many times did William Morris, using a phrase that was habitual with him, try to calm the naive impetuosity of militants, telling them that it would not all happen in a catastrophic way and that it was no use expecting "that some Monday morning the sun will rise on a communised world which was capitalistic on Saturday night"! <sup>47</sup> No, he would say to them "this complete Socialism, which is sometimes called Communism, cannot be realized all at once".<sup>48</sup> "... We Socialists never dream of building up by our own efforts in one generation a society altogether new." <sup>49</sup>

Here we are touching upon one of the fundamental aspects of Morris's utopian thinking, perhaps even its essential aspect, the one which most clearly reveals its maturity and range. At a time when the English nineteenth-century socialists were, in general, divided between opportunism and anarchism, the first relying on a slow penetration of existing institutions or the installation of rigorous and finalised state socialism, while the others imagined the immediate and violent establishment of absolute egalitarianism, only William Morris, in the wake of Marx and Engels, was able to expound the very theory which was to open the historical perspective for the Marxist parties of the twentieth century, the theory of two stages. The law which will govern social relationships during the first phase is: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his work", and in the subsequent and higher phase: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs".

I find it impossible to believe, along with E. P. Thompson, that Morris was able, without knowing of the ideas expressed by Karl Marx in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, to reach them "in his intuitive way".<sup>50</sup> This assertion (which explains nothing) is, after all, only made in the course of a rapid allusion to Marx's final paragraph on the second stage. Now, what is most original and remarkable in the famous passage of the *Critique*, is the part relating to the first stage and the analysis of what Marx calls "unequal right".<sup>51</sup> And it is exactly this analysis which we find several times over in Morris's writings. Despite my sincere admiration for his genius and my refusal to see him as nothing but a dreamer, it is difficult for me to believe that he was capable of rising to this theoretical level on his own. On the other hand, it is obvious that, in all the socialist literature of the period, there is never any explicit reference, other than in Marx's text, to the theory of two stages and even less to this "unequal right" which characterises the first stage. It was necessary to wait for Lenin<sup>52</sup> and the Soviet revolution for the problem to be finally expounded with the vigour conferred by actuality. It is to be expected, then, that this rare anticipation on the part of Marx should have exerted a considerable influence upon the utopian imagination of William Morris. But here is where the mystery begins. We find the theory of two stages expressed in Morris's writings from 1885, among the notes appended to the Manifesto of the Socialist League. Now, as I have said, *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written in 1875, could not appear, because of reservations on the part of the leaders of the German social democratic party, until 1891. The manuscript was in London among Engels's



papers, and I have indicated the importance of the contacts he had with Morris, contrary to traditional opinion, at the time of the split in the Social Democratic Federation and after the establishment of the Socialist League. Was it during the course of these direct contacts with Engels that Morris was introduced to the contents of the manuscript? Was it not through the intermediary of Bax, an intimate of Engels and a co-signatory of the Notes appended to the Manifesto of the League? At the present stage of research, there is no material evidence to settle the point. In my opinion, the rôle of Bax, while not negligible, does not appear to have been decisive. It is curious, in fact, that in his own later writings, despite his loquacity about the “morrrows of the revolution”, the theory of two stages is not mentioned and it is, on the other hand, interesting to note that Morris, in works written by himself alone, develops this theory, and even, more strikingly, repeats the idea of “unequal right”.

After this brief summary which has enabled me to identify the probable inspiration,<sup>53</sup> we are better able to appreciate the particular characteristics of Morris's thought. If, chronologically, the starting point of his thinking was the rediscovery of the “unequal right”, it was a polemical preoccupation which led him to develop the idea of two stages and to formulate definitions which are curiously anticipatory of modern terminology. So I think it preferable to examine this latter aspect first, as the others will be that much better clarified. It was in 1887 that he gave his lecture, *The Policy of Abstention*. Morris was then in the acute stage of his anti-parliamentarian period, and he was concentrating his attacks upon what he considered to be parliamentary opportunism. The main enemy was the “parliamentarianism” of the Aveling group, within the League itself, but, beyond this unacceptable ideology he was also thinking of Hyndman's “state socialism” and so, by reaction, he came to define his personal position:

“Now amongst Socialists there are some who think that the abolition of private property in the means of production only would bring about a stable condition of society which would carry out communism no further, that the *product* of labour working on raw material and aided by instruments which were common property, should not be common, but would be the prize of energy, industry, and talent, ‘to each one according to his deeds’ . . . Those who limit the revolution of Socialism to the abolition of private property merely in the means of production do contemplate a society in which production shall be in tutelage to the State; in which the centralized State would draw arbitrarily the line where public property ends and private property begins, would interfere with inheritance and with the accumulation of wealth, and in many ways would act as a master, and take the place of the old masters; acting with benevolent intention indeed, but with conscious artificiality and by means of the employment of obvious force which would be felt everywhere and would sometimes at least be evaded or even resisted, and so at last might even bring on a new revolution which might lead us backward for a while, or might carry us forward into a condition of true Communism according to the ripeness or unripeness of the State Socialist revolution: in short to some of us it seems as if this view of

Socialism simply indicates the crystallization of what can only be a transitional condition of society, and cannot in itself be stable: . . . many of us Communists for our part are willing to admit that the communization of the means of production will inevitably lead to the communization of the products of labour also . . . So you see there is hardly a question of issue on this point between the Socialists and the Communists . . . The opinions as to the means are not quite conterminous with the two schools of so-called Socialists and Communists, but they are nearly so, and naturally, since the former are prepared to accept as a necessity a central all-powerful authoritative government, a reformed edition, one may say, of the State government at present existing; whereas the Communists, though they are not clear as to what will take the place of that in the meanwhile, are at least clear that when the habit of social life is established nothing of the kind of authoritative central government will be needed or endured.”<sup>54</sup>

Before commenting upon this passage, I think it helpful to compare it with another lecture of Morris's, given the year before, which completes and clarifies it. He describes in almost the same words the doctrinal differences between the two schools, one advocating an authoritarian state, the single owner of the means of production, the other foreseeing the creation of a federation of communities enjoying the fruits of their labour in common, and their aim would be

“satisfying the needs of each member, only exacting from each that he should do his best according to his capacity towards the production of the common wealth”.

But this is Morris's conclusion:

“These two views of the future of society are sometimes opposed to each other as Socialism and Communism, but to my mind the latter is simply the necessary development of the former, which implies a transition period. . . .”<sup>55</sup>

An initial remark is necessary. William Morris was the first, it seems to me, to use the words socialism and communism to denote on the one hand the two stages of the new society and, on the other, two political doctrines: the first considering the first stage as an end in itself, the second only envisaging it as a step towards a higher stage. The use of these words by Marx and Engels at the time of the *Manifesto* was in a different context, and Engels felt obliged to explain, in his 1890 preface, why the adjective selected had been “communist” and not “socialist”: “In 1847 Socialism was a middle-class movement, Communism a working-class movement.”<sup>56</sup> The two usages, that of Marx and Engels and the quite new one of Morris, have continued side by side up to our time, sometimes causing regrettable confusion. For Morris the distinction between socialism and communism was clear: in his mind, it was drawn, not relative to the past or the present, but relative to the future, which is why he himself preferred the appellation Communist. It is a characteristic stressed by Bernard Shaw in his reminiscences:

“Morris, when he had to define himself politically, called himself a

Communist. Very often, of course, in discussing Socialism he had to speak of himself as a Socialist; but he jibbed at it internally, and flatly rebelled against such faction labels as Social-democrat and the like. He knew that the essential term, etymologically, historically, and artistically, was Communist; and it was the only word he was comfortable with.”<sup>57</sup>

One can hold it against Shaw, whose theoretical thinking fell short of Morris's, that he did not understand the fundamental reason for this choice, but the evidence he provides is none the less of value. In this matter of terminology, moreover, the poet is as precise as it is possible to be, and he ranks himself among the socialists who go all the way, that is, the communists.<sup>58</sup>

It is astounding to observe how most interpreters of Morris, generally through an ignorance of Marxism and often also because of their own political standpoint, have failed to discern in his utopia the constant distinction between the two successive stages, and have inevitably piled up false interpretations and misconstructions, the most frequent of these being, as we shall see,<sup>59</sup> the accusation of anarchism. But once again it would not be possible to accuse the poet of having sinned by silence or concealment. Declarations I have already quoted are eloquent. Others are no less so:

“Pure Communism,” he wrote in 1885, “is the logical deduction from the imperfect form of the new society, which is generally differentiated from it as Socialism.”<sup>60</sup>

“All genuine Socialists admit that Communism is the necessary development of Socialism.”<sup>61</sup>

“... true and complete Socialism ... what I should call communism.”<sup>62</sup>

“Communism is in fact the completion of Socialism: when that ceases to be militant and becomes triumphant, it will be Communism.”<sup>63</sup>

One could multiply these quotations, and I have selected here only the briefest, but Morris develops the theme of the two stages over pages in lectures such as *True and False Society*<sup>64</sup> or *The Policy of Abstention*.<sup>65</sup>

\* \* \*

The first stage is characterised by the obligation to work, imposed by constraint and by payment according to the abilities of the individual. But, these abilities being unequal, remuneration will be unequal and so socialism will be “the imperfect form of the new society”. There will result an “unequal right”, such as Marx had defined in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* and such as Morris begins to define in Note C which accompanied the second edition of the Manifesto of the Socialist League. I extract a few typical lines:

“The end which true Socialism sets before us is the realization of true equality of condition . . . according to the motto, *from each one according to his capacity, to each one according to his needs*; but it may be necessary, and probably will be, to go through a transitional period, during which currency will still be used as a medium of exchange, though of course it will not bear with it the impress of surplus value . . . The com-



munity must compel a certain amount of labour from every person not in nonage, or physically or mentally incapable . . . This labour may be arranged on the understanding that each person does an amount of work calculated on the average that an ordinary healthy person can turn out in a given time . . . It is clear that under this system, owing to the difference of capacity one man may have to work a longer and another a shorter time than the estimated average, and thus the result would fall short of the Communistic ideal of absolute equality . . . Finally, we look forward to the time when any definite exchange will have entirely ceased to exist.<sup>66</sup>

We must note that this "Communistic ideal of absolute equality" from now on takes on a very definite aspect and no longer has anything in common with the vague and abstract formulations which Marx deplored. In Morris's mind it is sufficiently clearly defined for it not to be possible for the first stage, however inevitable it seems, to be anything for him other than a stage. At the very time when this second edition of the *Manifesto of the League* was published, Morris gave in Bloomsbury that lecture of which no trace remains anywhere, of which I found the preparatory notes in Mr. Abramsky's collection. In it he refers again to the differences in ability from one individual to another. "The solution," he says, "excellent in its way, that each should have the results of his own labour, leaves out cripples and those most needing assistance. It must therefore be regarded as a very convenient but only rough statement of the object of Socialism." Its only advantage lies in providing a sharp contrast with the much greater inequality that obtains in the present form of society.<sup>67</sup> But absolute equality is impossible on this first phase:

"the old habit of rewarding excellence or special rare qualities with extra money payment will go on for a while, and some men will possess more wealth than others".<sup>68</sup>

A situation of this kind may even be prolonged at least to the end of the first stage and perhaps slightly beyond.<sup>69</sup> In short, we are only dealing with "the incomplete first stages of a society of equality", or, more exactly, "a society only *tending* to equality".<sup>70</sup> It is, naturally, in the lecture delivered at the culminating point of his anti-parliamentarianism, *The Policy of Abstinence*, that this "unequal right" seems most unjust to him and most difficult to tolerate for long. Note, all the same, that his indignation here is directed, not against the very existence of the first stage, which he regards as inevitable, but against those socialists who would be satisfied with it as a final settlement:

"We see no reason for setting up a higher standard of livelihood for A because he can turn out more work than B, while the needs of the two are just the same: if society is to be of use to B, it must defend him against the tyranny of nature; and if instead of defending him against nature it turns round and helps her to punish poor B for not being born of the same capacity of developing muscle as A, society is a traitor to B, and he if he be a man of any spirit will rebel against it."<sup>71</sup>

His vehemence calmed down in subsequent years, but to the very end he remained adamant about the temporary nature of this period during which

rights would remain unequal. The revolutionary struggle of modern times

“will end in realising a society wherein the means of production are communised, and a relative equality of condition as compared with modern capitalistic society will be attained. This and nothing less than this will be the beginning of Socialism in the true sense of the word; but it cannot stop at this point, but must have an immediate further development, and one which we can conceive of as being directly deducible from it.”<sup>72</sup>

This first stage will be “. . . the emancipation of labour, which will be brought about by the workers gaining possession of all the means of fructification of labour; and who, even when that is gained, shall have pure Communism ahead to strive for”.<sup>73</sup>

Would the obligation to work cease in the second stage, that of communist society? Certainly not: “every one . . . as a matter of course would have to pay his toll of some obviously useful work”;<sup>74</sup> “all shall produce who are able to do so”.<sup>75</sup> What would be new is that not only the means of production, but the products themselves, would be held in common and “all men’s needs must be satisfied according to the measure of the common wealth”.<sup>76</sup>

It is a curious fact that this idea had been present in a confused way in Morris’s thinking for a long time. In 1880, when he was still a member of the Liberal party, during a lecture containing an ardent apologia on behalf of Gladstone, he made the following remarks, which must have surprised his listeners:

“I think of a country where every man has work enough to do, and no one has too much: where no man has to work himself stupid in order to be just able to live: where on the contrary it will be easy for a man to live if he will but work, impossible if he will not (that is a necessary corollary): where every man’s work will be pleasant to himself and helpful to his neighbour; and then his leisure from bread-earning (of which he ought to have plenty) would be thoughtful and rational.”<sup>77</sup>

This vague dream was to take shape and become reasoned cogitation when he discovered Marxism and became familiar with the theory of the two stages. Once over the transition from the first stage in which everyone is remunerated according to his work, he sees more and more clearly in his mind the outline of communist society, the ideal and the aim to achieve, which, as Marx had written, would blazon on its banners: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” This formulation appears incessantly in various forms in the course of his militant life,<sup>78</sup> and is the principle which governed life in an England which had reached the second stage in the twenty-second century in the utopian vision of *News from Nowhere*.





# Notes to the Text

## Introduction

1. Professor Norman Kelvin of New York City College is now undertaking the formidable task of collecting and publishing Morris's complete correspondence.
2. It would be less than just not to mention, among the valuable works devoted to Morris, the old study (1945), by an American, Margaret Grennan, of his mediaevalism, which was original and well documented.

## Chapter I

1. "...what was almost a closed book – my father's thoughts on the Unknown. . .” (May MORRIS, I, p. 80). J. Bruce Glasier similarly notes: "Religion was a subject on which Morris never touched". (*William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 164).
2. MACKAIL, I, p. 10. At that time there were many Quaker families in Walthamstow (May MORRIS, II, p. 613).
3. May MORRIS, II, p. 16.
4. *Letters*, p. 184.
5. MACKAIL, I, p. 10.
6. To Emma Morris, 13 April 1849, *Letters*, p. 4.
7. "Morris left school a pronounced Anglo-Catholic". (MACKAIL, I, p. 17).
8. MACKAIL, I, p. 24.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Letters*, p. 185.
12. MACKAIL, I, p. 31.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
17. May MORRIS, I, p. 382.
18. MACKAIL, I, p. 62.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
20. "And the idea of a common organized effort by the whole group towards a higher life, which for long had been eagerly planned, gradually shifted from the form of a monastic to that of a social brotherhood" (MACKAIL I, p. 62).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
22. "Our Monastery will come to nought, I'm afraid. . . Morris has become questionable in doctrinal points, and Ted is too Catholic to be ordained. He and Morris diverge more and more in views though not in friendship" (G.B.J. : *Memorials of Burne-Jones*, I, p. 109).
23. MACKAIL, I, p. 78: *Memorials* . . . , I, pp. 114-5.

24. He wrote to his mother in November: "I remember speaking somewhat roughly to you when we had conversation last on this matter" (*Letters*, p. 16).
25. "I am certainly coming back, though I should not have done so if it had not been for my Mother; I don't think even if I get through Greats that I shall take my B.A., because they won't allow you not to sign the 39 articles unless you declare that you are "extra Ecclesiam Anglicanam" which I'm not, and don't intend to be, and I won't sign the 39 Articles" (*Letters*, p. 14). Note, in passing, Morris's aversion towards the Non-conformist churches, whose puritanism never had his sympathy.
26. *Letters*, pp. 15-17.
27. (*Letters*, p. 15). Later, in 1883, in his autobiographical letter to Scheu, the idea of having been destined for the Church is presented as comically improbable: "I who had been originally intended for the Church!!! " (*Ibid.*, p. 185).
28. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
29. *Letters*, p. 21; MACKAIL, I, p. 161; see also Rosalie Glyn GRYLLES, *Portrait of Rossetti*, p. 85. May was baptised on 30 May 1862 at Bexleyheath.
30. In fact, he wrote to his wife on 26 November 1870: "Tell Emmie I shall have a Christmas present for her which I hope may tend in some degree towards counteracting a youth spent in – ah!" (*Letters*, p. 37).
31. "I almost expect to see Aunt Emma this week: she has come up to town on what I must irreverently call holy larks" (*Letters*, p. 170). "Wot larks" was one of the family sayings. Morris had taken it from Dickens's *Great Expectations*, one of his favourite books: it was a usual greeting when he wrote to his daughters.
32. "Sunday I must say was dullsome; for it rained hard all day; the others of them went to chapel in the morning, which treat I refused" (*Letters*, p. 74; see also pp. 65 and 104). Morris even refused to observe traditional festivals. May Morris wrote to Scheu on 25 December 1885: "We don't give presents at Xmas in our family as a rule, and yours was my only gift" (*Scheu Correspondence*, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam).
33. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 8-9.
34. May MORRIS, I, p. 397.
35. *The Earthly Paradise, An Apology*, p. 1.
36. *Ibid.*, *L'Envoi*, p. 445.
37. May MORRIS, I, pp. 442-3.
38. C.W., VII, p. XXXVI.
39. *Letters*, p. 143.
40. *The Earthly Paradise, The Writing on the Image*, p. 123.
41. *The House of Wolfings*, C.W., XIV, pp. 108-9.
42. *The Earthly Paradise, The Story of Cupid and Psyche*, p. 122.
43. "I suppose you saw Bradlaugh's speech; it was very good; as indeed it might well be his position being so strong in fact" (*Letters*, p. 171). On Bradlaugh's struggles for free-thinking, cf. Annie BESANT: *An Autobiography*, pp. 253-76.
44. *Letters*, p. 200.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 282. Cf.: "But while John Ball had been speaking to me I felt strangely, as though I had more things to say than the words I knew I could make clear: as if I wanted to get from other people a new set of words" (*A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, p. 237). Louis Althusser wrote not long ago: "...it is in relation to the concepts and terms available that every fresh theory, even a revolutionary one, should find the means of thinking and expressing its radical newness." ("Sur le travail théorique: Difficultés et ressources", *La Pensée*, no. 132, April 1967, p. 17).
46. "Christianity and Socialism", *Commonweal*, 8 March 1890, p. 77/II; May MORRIS, II, p. 302.
47. *Letters*, p. 201.
48. On 6 May 1888, he was to write to Rev. George Bainton: "As to the metaphysical

- side of religion, or its mystical side, I must confess I felt no disposition to discuss them, because I find that such discussions inevitably become word-contests" (*Letters*, p. 290).
49. *A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, pp. 212-3.
  50. *Introductory Note to Good King Wenceslas*, by Dr. Neale, 1894, May MORRIS, I, pp. 295-6.
  51. *Feudal England*, 1887, *Signs*, p. 73.
  52. See *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 64-5, 82.
  53. *Letters*, p. 215.
  54. "In religion I am a pagan," he confided one evening in November 1892 to Sydney C. Cockerell (C.W., XXII, p. XXX) and Mackail wrote to the latter on 3 March 1899: "Can you date any occasion (there were I think more than one) in which Morris said of himself: 'In religion I am a pagan'?" (B.M. Add. Mss. 52 734 (22) ).
  55. Date given by Philip Henderson (*Letters*, p. 244, n. 1) and by R. C. H. Briggs (*A Handlist of the Public Addresses of William Morris*, p. 11).
  56. May MORRIS, II, p. 221.
  57. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 85.
  58. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 293-4.
  59. "... *a priori* ideas of the relation of man to the universe or some imagined ruler of it. . ." (May MORRIS, II, p. 313).
  60. "Workhouse Socialism", *Commonweal*, 1st November 1890, p. 345/II.
  61. *Equality*, 1888, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 333-4 (11).
  62. For example: "'Go in peace, and God and Allhallows keep thee' said the hermit. - 'Well, well', said Steelhead, 'we will not contend about it, but I look to it to keep myself'. And therewith he strode off into the night" (*The Sundering Flood*, C.W., XXI, p. 189).
  63. W. Scawen BLUNT, *My Diaries*, pp. 228-9.
  64. Bruce GLASIER, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 171.
  65. William GALLACHER, *Last Memoirs*, pp. 114-5.
  66. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 294.
  67. *Ibid.* p. 295.
  68. *A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, pp. 243-5.
  69. May MORRIS, I, p. 80.
  70. *The Journals of T. J. Cobden-Sanderson*, I, p. 322.
  71. May MORRIS, I, p. 80.
  72. *Ibid.* She even goes so far as saying that, for Morris, the supreme reason for living was his "reverence for the unsolvable mystery" (May MORRIS, II, p. 2).
  73. *Early England*, 1886, LE MIRE, p. 163.
  74. Cf. MACKAIL, I, p. 334.
  75. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 142.
  76. *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 622.
  77. *Justice and Socialism*, 1885, see Appendix I, p. 579.
  78. "He hated Wordsworth as far as any poet could hate the author of *Intimations of Immortality*; but this must be heavily discounted to allow for the overwhelming reaction against Fundamentalist Evangelicalism, which made it impossible for the vanguard to be just to any poet who was under the smallest suspicion of piety" (G. Bernard SHAW: *Morris as I Knew Him*; May MORRIS, II, p. XXXIII). This hatred is similarly recalled by Cobden-Sanderson: "Morris was unmeasured in his abuse of Wordsworth. . ." (*Journals of T. J. Cobden-Sanderson*, I, p. 180). It is interesting to observe that this aversion was proof against the influence of Ruskin, whose piousness frequently led to copious quotations from Wordsworth.
  79. May MORRIS, I, p. 79.
  80. *Letters*, p. 8. A more sarcastic note appears in a letter of 19 May 1883: "I came



back in an open trap on Tuesday, and as I went through Roehampton Lane the driver told me about the nunnery there, and how he had heard the nuns singing angelically out in the garden on Whitsun Sunday night: so I stood up and looked over the fence, and lo, a lot of my holy dames, black and white just getting into boats to have a row on the lake there: for you must know that the grounds in there are quite splendid: it must be a very rich house" (*Letters*, p. 172).

81. C.W., VIII, p. 15.
82. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 509.
83. *The History of Pattern-Designing*, 1882, C.W., XXII, p. 233.
84. *Letters*, p. 86.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 121. Morris's indignation sometimes showed itself more directly. W. R. Lethaby tells how, after visiting a 'restored' church, "he rushed to the window of the inn shaking his fist as the parson passed by" (*Philip Webb and his Work*, p. 150). We find a similar anecdote in W. Scawen Blunt's memoirs: "I took him yesterday to see Shipley Church, a fine old Norman tower, injured with restoration. He was very indignant, swearing at the parsons as we walked up the nave: 'Beasts! Pigs! Damn their souls!'" (*My Diaries*, p. 229).
87. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, pp. 497, 499.
88. *The Aims of Art*, 1886, Nonesuch, p. 590.
89. *Letters*, p. 150.
90. *The End and the Means*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 434.
91. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 113.
92. "It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." (Karl MARX, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface, pp. 11-2).
93. *The Art of the People*, 1879, Nonesuch, pp. 534-5.
94. THOMPSON, p. 856.
95. *Letters*, p. 290.
96. May MORRIS, II, p. 301, suggests that the reference is to Rev. Father Joseph Rickaby of the Society of Jesus.
97. May MORRIS, II, p. 302.
98. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 91, 95.
99. *Gothic Architecture*, 1889, Nonesuch, p. 488.
100. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 95-9.
101. *The Gothic Revival*, I, LE MIRE, p. 73. Cf.: "Protestantism is essentially a bourgeois religion" (Karl MARX, *Capital*, p. 793).
102. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 19 January 1889, pp. 17/II, 18/I.
103. *Socialism*, 1885; May MORRIS, II, p. 193.
104. *The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 260.
105. *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, pp. 576, 578.
106. *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, THOMPSON, p. 852.
107. *Art and Socialism*, 1881, Nonesuch, p. 639.
108. *Misery and the Way Out*, 1884; May MORRIS, II, p. 161.
109. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 72.
110. *Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, p. 149.
111. "As to the Students I fear that the damned religion is at the bottom of their hanging back." (*Letters*, p. 203).
112. *Monopoly: or How Labour is Robbed*, 1887, JACKSON, p. 204.
113. *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, p. 311.
114. *The Tables Turned; or Nupkins Awakened*, May MORRIS, II, p. 530.
115. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 209, 224.
116. May MORRIS, II, pp. 257-8.
117. *Socialism*, 1885, *ibid.*, p. 192.

118. *Manifesto of the Socialist League*. Note E, THOMPSON, p. 856.
119. *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 179.
120. *Letters*, p. 271. Cf. *Justice and Socialism*, Appendix I, p. 579; Bruce GLASIER, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5, 164.
121. *Capital*, pp. 278, 291.
122. May MORRIS, II, p. 313.
123. *The Political Outlook*, 1886, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 333-4 (10). May Morris has omitted this passage from the extracts from this lecture published in her second volume.
124. *Philanthropists*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 123.
125. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 88.
126. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 11 August 1888, p. 249/I.
127. "Notes on News", *ibid.*, 12 January 1889, p. 12/II.
128. "Notes on News", *ibid.*, 27 October 1888, p. 337/II.
129. *Socialism*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, p. 196.
130. *Address at the Annual Supper of the Kelmscott Fellowship*, March 1932. The typewritten text of this speech is in the Mattison Collection.
131. "The blatant Atheism of those who entered the movement from the free-thinking side tended effectually to prevent the more thoughtful working-man, who was usually attached to some religious body, from joining the Socialists, and Morris did not find it easy to keep meetings from heated discussion of the subject." (May MORRIS, II, p. 109).
132. *Preface to the Nature of Gothic by John Ruskin*, May MORRIS, I, p. 293.
133. On this point, more specially concerning Marx in England, see the excellent work by Henry COLLINS and Chimen ABRAMSKY: *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 110-1, 120-1.
134. "Religion is gone down the wind, and will no more cumber us unless we are open fools" (*Communism i.e. Property*, 1892, May MORRIS, II, p. 347).
135. *Letters*, p. 211.
136. Engels wrote to Laura Lafargue on 5 February 1884: "Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant are furious at the new Socialist 'rage' in London which threatens to cut short their wittles, and so have opened an attack or two on T[ussy] and A[veling], Bradlaugh throws about the most mysterious innuendoes about Mohr's having preached assassination and arson and having been in secret league with Continental governments. . . ." (Friedrich ENGELS, Paul and Laura LAFARGUE, *Correspondence*, Vol I, pp. 168-9). Tussy was the pet name of Eleanor Marx, the philosopher's younger daughter and Aveling's companion. Mohr was the name by which Karl Marx was known in his own family.
137. Cf. May MORRIS, II, pp. 102-3.
138. On 9 July 1884 he wrote to Andreas Scheu, who opposed Annie Besant in Edinburgh after opposing Bradlaugh in London: "I was glad to hear that you were knocking about the Freethinkers. What a game for Mrs. Besant to see you jump up in Edinburgh after having had the last of you in London: she must have thought it a sort of nightmare" (*Letters*, p. 201). On 26 November he chaffed William Allingham about those who influenced him: "You have got together a funny menagerie in George, Wallace, Bradlaugh, and Harrison: of course the last two curse Socialism" (*ibid.*, p. 215).
139. *Communism i.e. Property*, 1892, May MORRIS, II, pp. 346 and 348. Cf.: "Nowadays atheism itself is *culpa levis*, as compared with criticism of existing property relations" (Karl MARX: *Capital*, p. 15).
140. Interesting evidence from contemporaries stresses this absence of sectarianism. Yeats writes: "The attitude towards religion of almost everybody but Morris, who avoided the subject altogether, got upon my nerves" (*Autobiographies*, p. 183); H. V. Wiles relates in his book of the recollections entrusted to him by Frank

Colebrook: "I recall, too, that a well-known barrister called Bompas – a Queen's Counsel, I think he was, after a Morris address at a public hall in Hampstead, asked if the principles and the way of life he had commended to them had not all been proclaimed in the New Testament. Thereupon, Morris told the gathering that he had always avoided a religious controversy; he wanted every man or woman to be entirely free in these matters. He therefore declined to give precise answer to Mr. Bompas for he didn't want that afternoon's subject to be side-tracked. He wanted people to go away thinking of a large fellowship effort to make life on this earth more seemly, more friendly; more radiant altogether, for all folk of whatever religious faith" (*William Morris of Walthamstow*, pp. 34-5). According to Morris, says Bruce Glasier, "anti-religious bigotry was twin brother to religious bigotry, and the socialist movement had suffered from it" (*op. cit.*, p. 139). In an interview which enabled him to define the nature of his socialism, Morris said to his interviewer: "...we do not want to interfere with the *speculative belief* of any man: 'by their fruits ye shall know them': if the dogmas of any religion lead to the practical support of oppression and injustice, there must be something wrong in them. Otherwise it is possible that at the worst they represent some tendency in human nature, past or present, and were, at any rate, alive once" (William SINCLAIR: "Socialism according to William Morris", *The Fortnightly Review*, October 1910, pp. 733-4).

141. See May MORRIS, II, p. 100.

142. *Letters*, p. 290.

143. Cf. Brian SIMON: *Education and the Labour Movement*, *passim*.

144. *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, THOMPSON, p. 852.

145. *Letters*, p. 254.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

147. *Appeal for the Preservation of Inglesham Church*, 1887, May MORRIS, I, p. 160.

148. William Allingham notes in his diary that Morris, discussing with him the existence of God, said: "It is so unimportant, it seems to me" (*A Diary*, p. 316).

149. "Mind you, I don't think this change in the family (or in religion) can be done by force. It is a matter of opinion, and must come of the opinion of people free economically. I rely on the stomach for bringing it about" (Letter addressed in 1886 or 1887 to the Rev. William Sharman, a Unitarian minister and member of the Socialist League; it was published 18 April 1903 in the *Labour Leader* and completely forgotten; E. P. Thompson reprinted it in his pamphlet: *The Communism of William Morris*, p. 4).

150. "I agree that it would not be so much impolitic as impossible to pronounce on matters of religion and family. People's instincts are, I think, leading them in the right direction, in these matters, and yet the old superstitions, as they have now become, have such a veil of tradition and literature about them it is difficult to formulate the probabilities (they can be no more) of the new order in words that will not be misunderstood, and so cause offence" (Letter to Dr. John Glasse, 23 May 1887; R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris, the Man and the Myth*, p. 83).

151. *Preface to the Nature of Gothic by John Ruskin*, 1892, May MORRIS, I, p. 293.

152. *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, note E, THOMPSON, p. 856.

153. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 123.

154. *Equality*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 199.

155. *To Blackwell*, *ibid.*, p. 313.



## Chapter II

1. Page 16.
2. "Looking Backward", *Commonweal*, 22 June 1889, p. 194/I; May MORRIS, II, p. 502.
3. Georges Duveau considers this problem, but he tends (exaggeratedly, I think) to confuse utopia and planning: "But the discipline of manufacture, in conjunction with the complexity of the contemporary world, today more and more leads the proletariat into accepting the planning that is advocated by men in whom they have confidence and whose all-powerful authority they accept. The dreams of the utopist and the very dialectic of contemporary production tend to meet at a common crossroads (*op. cit.*, pp. 12-3). . . In planning itself, the modern world tends to live under the sign of utopia (*ibid.*, p. 35)." Raymond Ruyer (*L'Utopie et les utopies*, p. 85) is less black-and-white: "Certainly, a Five-Year Plan does not resemble a utopia like those of Plato or Fourier. But there is surely something in common between utopias and plans, namely, the orientation towards a systematically devised end, which, once attained, will represent a stage of development".
4. *Letters*, pp. 184-5.
5. MACKAIL, I, p. 14.
6. THOMPSON, p. 50.
7. MACKAIL, I, p. 49.
8. MACKAIL, I, p. 162.
9. MACKAIL, II, p. 323-4; C.W., XXIV, p. XV.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-62.
11. *Memorials of William Morris*, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 350.
12. We read, nevertheless: "As to the price per yard named by you, the only thing *we* have to consider is the possibility of selling the cloths as a profit." (To Thomas Wardle, 2 November 1875, Victoria and Albert Museum Mss).
13. He wrote to Scheu on 5 September 1883: "I have been working hard at my business, in which I have had a considerable success even from the commercial side. . . as it is I have nothing to complain of. . ." (*Letters*, p. 187).
14. "An incident which occurred in the Oxford Street showroom. . . gives an instance of what he had perpetually to bear from this invincible ignorance, and of how he sometimes found it past bearing. A person of importance called to discuss the carpeting of his new house. The best specimens of the Hammersmith carpets, then produced in a complete range of pure bright colour, were submitted to his inspection. He gave them a somewhat impatient and wandering attention. 'Are these all?' he asked. He was told yes. 'But I thought,' he went on, 'your colours were subdued?' At this Morris, who had been gradually boiling up during the interview, boiled over. 'If you want dirt,' he broke out, 'you can find that in the street.' To the street the offended customer turned, and that was the end of his dealings with Morris and Company" (MACKAIL, I, pp. 313-4). The source of this story is to be found in *George Wardle's Memorials of William Morris*, 1897, B.M. Add. Mss 45 350 (p. 11).
15. ". . . a rich man (so-called) I never either can or will become: nay, I am trying in a feeble way to be more thrifty – whereof no more, lest I boast now and be disgraced at Christmas" (To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 23 August 1882, *Letters*, p. 160).
16. "I should very much like to make the business quite a success, and it can't be, unless I work at it myself. I must say, though I don't call myself money-greedy, a smash on that side would be a terrible nuisance; I have so many serious troubles, pleasures, hopes and fears, that I have not time on my hands to be ruined and get really poor: above all things it would destroy my freedom of work, which is a dear delight to me" (To Mrs. Coronio, 11 February 1873, *Letters*, p. 53).
17. See the description of it left by May MORRIS, C.W., XIII, pp. XVIII-XXI.

18. May MORRIS, II, p. XXIV.
19. 26 March 1878, *Letters*, p. 117.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
21. *Isis*, n° 1500, 11 November 1965, p. 15/I.
22. See the interesting chapter entitled *Mistress and Servants* in Marion Lochhead's book, *The Victorian Household*, pp. 30-44.
23. "His head was always so much buried in his work that I don't think he'd notice a little thing like me," Floss Gunner says modestly (*Isis*, p. 15/II). Cf. MACKAIL, II, p. 93: "in the ordinary concerns of life, he was strangely incurious of individuals".
24. Huntington Library Mss, San Marino, California, U.S.A.
25. MACKAIL, I, p. 214.
26. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 94-5.
27. *Letters*, p. 203.
28. MACKAIL, I, p. 154.
29. "She is an accidental person with whom I have nothing whatever to do" (*Letters*, p. 50).
30. *Ibid.*, p. 52. However, in his will Morris left an annual income of £150 to Bessy (see letter of 5 December 1915 from S. Cockerell to May Morris, B.M. Add. Mss, 52 740, and the letters from Jane Morris to S. Cockerell preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum).
31. C.W., II, p. XII; May MORRIS, I, p. 66.
32. *Letters*, p. 231.
33. Cf. Mackail's manuscripts (Walthamstow Mss, J. 163-6) and the letters sent by Mackail to S. Cockerell in September 1898 (B.M. Add. Mss. 52 734).
34. *Letters*, pp. 388-9; Walthamstow Mss, J. 143.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 106.
37. *Letters*, p. 389.
38. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 135.
40. *Art, a Serious Thing*, 1882, LE MIRE, p. 51.
41. *The Lesser Arts of Life*, 1882, MACMILLAN, pp. 195, 196, 198.
42. *The Art of the People*, 1879, Nonesuch, pp. 535-6.
43. *The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 261.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.
46. This paternalistic illusion was long-lasting and, a year after his conversion to socialism, he still wrote: "Now once more I will say that we well-to-do people, those of us who love Art . . . have for our best work the raising of the standard of life among the people" (*Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 636).
47. MARX and ENGELS: *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 23-4.
48. ". . . here and there a few men of the upper and middle classes, moved by their conscience and insight, may and will throw in their lot with the working classes. . ." (*Letters*, p. 190).
49. "The middle classes will one day become conscious of the discontent of the proletariat; before that some will have renounced their class and cast in their lot with the working men, influenced by love of justice and insight into facts" (*Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, p. 153).
50. "In introducing him, Dr. Glasse spoke of the significance of the fact that the most gifted artistic genius of our day had associated himself with a movement that was everywhere condemned as being but the expression of sordid and uncultured discontent. Yet no one could say that William Morris was uncultured or had any reason in a wordly sense to be discontented with his lot. It was because of his extraordinary gift of political and artistic insight that he realised more keenly

than did the men of his class the hopeless ugliness and injustice of our present social system and was in revolt against it. William Morris was not only a prophet of Socialism but was himself a prophecy of Socialism" (Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 23). According to Glasier, the lecture in question was "Misery and the Way Out", delivered in Edinburgh on 17 November 1884, but he is certainly mistaken, because that lecture was chaired by Robert Buist (cf. LE MIRE, p. 224).

51. May MORRIS, I, p. 67.
52. *Letters*, p. 200.
53. MACKAIL, II, p. 58.
54. We read, for example, from the pen of a certain F. Richardson, in the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review* of July 1892, p. 425: "This Modern Moses of Socialism prefers the ease and luxury of commercial Egypt to the arduous and risky labour of leading the hosts to their promised land."
55. "... a few years ago the movement was confined to a few persons, of education and of superior intelligence, most of whom belonged by position to the middle classes" ("Why I am a Communist", *Liberty*, February 1894, p. 14/I). Bax's memoirs provide identical evidence: "It is noteworthy in this connexion that the Socialism of the eighties and even the early nineties – i.e., the new scientific Socialism of Marx and all that implied – was mainly a middle-class movement. The working classes, to whom in the nature of things the movement ought to have appealed, were largely apathetic and unresponsive in this country for a long time. The work of education in the new social and economic views was mainly done by middle-class men. (E. Belfort Bax: *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid-and-Late Victorian*, pp. 71-2). In a lecture given in 1884, *Misery and the Way Out*, Morris exclaimed: "... here I stand before you, one of the most fortunate of this happy class, so steeped in discontent, that I have no words which will express it ... my case is not so uncommon among men of my class: nay the members of the S.D.F. who address you are by no means all of them working-men, there are plenty of them who are in the same position as myself" (May MORRIS, II, p. 156).
56. LE MIRE, pp. 144-5 of the typewritten edition.
57. Cf. Henry S. SALT: *Seventy Years Among Savages*, pp. 61-2.
58. Edward CARPENTER: *My Days and Dreams*, p. 46.
59. E. Belfort BAX: *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid-and-Late Victorian*, pp. 173-82.
60. Chushichi TSUZUKI: *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, pp. 26-8, 92, 140-4, 270.
61. THOMPSON, p. 348; Chushichi TSUZUKI, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
62. Chushichi TSUZUKI, *ibid.*
63. "There was Hyndman in his immaculate frock coat and high hat; there was Morris, dressed in his usual blue serge suit and soft hat; Joynes in his aesthetic dress; Champion looking every inch the military man; Frost looking every inch the aristocrat; Quelch and myself in our everyday working clothes. I am sure we made an impression on that day" (Jack WILLIAMS: "From the Past to the Present", *Justice*, 15 January 1914, p. 2/I).
64. H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 252. (The spelling 'Llama' is Hyndman's.)
65. V. I. LENIN: *On Britain*, (Moscow, 1959), *passim* and particularly pp. 88, 111-6, 151.
66. "I found myself clubless in London, which at first was a curious sensation for me" (H. M. HYNDMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 416).
67. Cf. the very characteristic portrait Glasier sketches of him: "Hyndman, striking in appearance, with his long, flowing senatorial beard, his keen, restless, searching eyes, and full intellectual brow, dressed in the city best, frock-coat suit of the day, with full display of white linen – his whole manner alert, pushful, and, shall I say,



domineering – looked the very embodiment of middle-class respectability and capitalist ideology; a man of the world, a Pall Mall politician from top to toe” (GLASIER, *op. cit.*, p. 29).

68. See, for example, HYNDMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
69. Cf. Dona TORR: *Tom Mann and his Times*, I, p. 204.
70. “That, as Marx said, the emancipation of the workers must be brought about by the workers themselves is true in the sense that we cannot have Socialism without Socialists, any more than we can achieve and carry on a Republic without Republicans. But a slave-class cannot be freed by the slaves themselves. The leadership, the initiative, the teaching, the organisation, must come from those who are born into a different position, and are used to train their faculties in early life” (HYNDMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 432-3).
71. “The Principles of Justice”, *Justice*, 19 January 1884, p. 4/I-II. Cf. Chushichi TSUZUKI, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
72. “That unutterable and sickening misery of which a few details are once again reaching us as if from some distant unhappy country, of which we could scarcely expect to hear” (*Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, p. 146).
73. “. . . the poor wretches, the news of whom we of the middle-class are just now receiving with such naïf wonder and horror. . .” (*Ibid.*, p. 144). In 1884, he writes again: “I confess I have never dared to myself to visit the homes of these poor people though I have seen them in the streets and have heard plenty about them” (*Misery and the Way Out*, 1884; May MORRIS, II, p. 151).
74. *Art and the Beauty of the Earth*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 170.
75. “Most true it is that whiles I am sitting at home at work or in rest with all the aids to a pleasant life around me which mere chance as it seems has given me, and I hear outside brutal and drunken voices, murdering with obscene language and coarse tones the pleasure of the fair spring Sunday there rises up in me the brutality of my own heart and would stir me into fury against that other brutality if I did not remember that these also are my fellows, merely unluckier than I: not worse. And then indeed I fall a-wondering at the strange and slender thread of circumstance which has armed me for doing and forbearing with that refinement which I didn’t make myself, but was born into” (*An Address to the Nottingham Kyrle Society*, 1881, May MORRIS, I, pp. 201-2).
76. “Do you know, when I see a poor devil drunk and brutal I always feel, quite apart from my aesthetical perceptions, a sort of shame, as if I myself had some hand in it” (To Mrs. George Howard, August 1874, *Letters*, p. 64).
77. “Indeed I have been ashamed when I have thought of the contrast between my happy working hours and the unpraised, unrewarded, monotonous drudgery which most men are condemned to” (To the *Manchester Examiner*, 14 March 1883, *ibid.*, p. 166). Cf. “. . . the contrasts of rich and poor are unendurable” (To C. E. Maurice, 1st July 1883, *ibid.*, p. 176).
78. “. . . ashamed of my own position. . .” (To C. E. Maurice, 1st July 1883, *ibid.*, p. 176).
79. Bruce GLASIER, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 91.
80. “. . . a sense of shame in one’s better luck not possible to express.” (“Facing the Worst”, *Commonweal*, 19 February 1887, p. 61/I); “Year by year we of the middle classes, as we are getting more conscious of what we ought to be, are getting more and more hateful and contemptible to ourselves and others” (“Honesty is the Best Policy; or, The Inconvenience of Stealing, A Dialogue”, *Commonweal*, 12 November 1887, p. 365/II); “. . . we suffer merely selfishly if you will from the consciousness of the mass of suffering and brutality which lies below our lucky class-ugliness. . .” (*Misery and the Way Out*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 157).
81. “The dominant classes are uneasy, anxious, touched in conscience even, as to the condition of those they govern. . .” (THOMPSON, p. 853).

82. "My chief trial is in the cowardice and sensuality and luxury of my own character which keeps me down – ashamed to take any true leadership – unwilling to give up my own mean ways of rich life – but I shall be driven to something desperate soon – I believe"; "... a byework to quiet my conscience, that I might be happy in what I supposed to be my own proper life of art-teaching" (*The Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, p. 485).
83. "We make the English labourer work industriously *after* he has supplied his humble (very humble) wants, and thereby make him supply our own not so humble wants" ("Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 12 February 1887, p. 49/1).
84. "I believe the time is at hand when each one of us of the well-to-do and rich classes will have to choose whether he will strive to have the great mass of men his equals and friends, or to keep them down as his slaves: when that time comes may we all remember this, that wretched and shameful as is the condition of a slave, there is one condition more wretched and shameful still – that of slave-holder" (*Of the Origins of Ornamental Art*, 1886, LE MIRE, p. 157).
85. *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 626.
86. "... clear our own consciences of the guilt of enslaving men by their labour. . . Can the middle-classes regenerate themselves?" (*Ibid.*, p. 629).
87. *Ibid.*, p. 630.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 644. Cf. "I address one last word to my middle-class hearers. . . throw in your lot with the workers at every stage of the struggle" (*Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 118).
89. Cf. LE MIRE, p. 249.
90. "You will at least be mocked at and laughed at by those whose mockery is a token of honour to an honest man; but you will, I don't doubt it, be looked at coldly by many excellent people, not *all* of whom will be quite stupid. You will run the risk of losing position, reputation, money, friends even: losses which are certainly pin-pricks to the serious martyrdom I have spoken of; but which none the less try the stuff a man is made of – all the more as he can escape them with little other reproach of cowardice than that which his own conscience cries out at him" (Nonesuch, p. 644).
91. He wrote to W. Scawen Blunt on 3 March 1885: "... as a Socialist I stink in people's nostrils" (Victoria and Albert Museum Mss).
92. See MACKAIL, II, pp. 98-9, 117-20; THOMPSON, pp. 368-9; Jessie KOCMANOVA: *The Poetic Maturing of William Morris*, p. 9.
93. Cf. Shaw's evidence: "I knew that the sudden eruption into her temple of beauty, with its pre-Raphaelite priests, of the proletarian comrades who began to infest the premises as Morris's fellow-Socialists, must be horribly disagreeable to her. . .; and as one of this ugly rag-tag-and-bobtail of Socialism I could not expect her to do more than bear my presence as best she might" (May MORRIS, II, p. XXIV). This antipathy was lasting: Morris wrote to Andreas Scheu inviting him to pay a visit: "There will be no one to object to you as I am alone with the girls at present" (Letter of 23 November 1889, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam). And in an earlier invitation he had thought it wise to tell Scheu: "I shall be by myself" (20 August 1886, *Letters*, p. 258).
94. "A schoolmaster's attitude," says Le Mire (p. 144 of the typewritten edition).
95. *Letters*, p. 171.
96. 27 May 1885, *Letters*, p. 237. He wrote to Scheu some time earlier: "I have not got hold yet of the strings that tie us to the working-class members" (18 July 1884, *ibid.*, p. 204). A very curious letter from May Morris to Bernard Shaw (19 November 1885) throws into bright relief these feelings of embarrassment and uncertainty. She wrote: "... you are not quite fair in asserting that I blindly admire the proletarian class with wh[ich] I have been in contact to some extent of late, – while hating the bourgeoisie. I have probably said something crude and rash to

that effect, but I see clearly enough now that one's relations with the former are more artificial by far than with the latter. – Still as to those who, however blindly and blunderingly, are struggling towards a certain stage in the progress of humanity which all who have thought and studied know to be sound and possible, – I don't see how a man can help coming forward and proffering these the light of his sagacity and clearness of vision. – We (comparatively) wealthy people who step into the movement, stand at such an obvious disadvantage amongst the rest. . . ." (B.M. Add. Mss. 50 541, f<sup>os</sup> 49-50). Incidentally, it is noticeable that May still retained the paternalistic attitude that her father had already discarded.

97. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 114-5. Already, in 1884, he wrote to Mrs. Burne-Jones of the early indications of revolution: "...as you know some of us seem to see signs of this on the way, at which I admit that the flesh of this hanger-on of the capitalist class trembles though his spirit is willing" (1st June 1884, *Letters*, p. 200).
98. Cf. the pertinent analysis of this poem by Jessie KOCMANOVA: *The Poetic Maturing of William Morris*, p. 201.
99. THOMPSON, p. 642.
100. B.M. Add. Mss. 50 541 (80).
101. Cf.: "Every age has had its hopes, hopes that look to something beyond the life of the age itself, hopes that try to pierce into the future; . . . in sober truth it may well be that these hopes are but a reflection in those that live happily and comfortably of the vain longings of those others who suffer with little power of expressing their sufferings in an audible voice" (*The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 84).
102. On Thomas Binning, see THOMPSON, pp. 442-3.
103. "Correspondence", *Commonweal*, 25 February 1888, p. 61/II.
104. The general tone of these attacks is indicated by the following anonymous snippet: "There is nothing of the lean and hungry-looking poet in his appearance. There is far more of the prosperous *bourgeois*, saving, of course, what suggestion of poesy and revolution may reside in the sombrero. His home at Hammersmith is an artistic paradise. Socialists and painters abound there." (*The Echo*, 7 November 1888, p. 1/VI).
105. *Letters*, p. 73; MACKAIL, I, p. 324.
106. In an account of a debate which took place in Cambridge in 1884, we read: "Mr. William Morris at once rose to reply to the personal question, and to confess that, while not a capitalist in the ordinary sense of the word, he must admit to his own conscience that he was one of a class that lives upon the labour of other people". (*Justice*, 23 February 1884, p. 6/II).
107. "I am not a very rich man. . ." he said during a public meeting at Somers Town in the 'nineties (Owen Carroll, "William Morris among the Reds", *Everyman*, 23 September 1933, p. 351/II). "I am not quite a rich man, as rich men go nowadays", he said in Glasgow, replying to a question, and adding: "but I am richer than I ought to be compared with the mass of my fellows; or rather, perhaps, I shall say they are poorer than they ought to be" (GLASIER, *op. cit.*, p. 109).
108. "A veteran Glasgow Green debater, 'Old John Torley', as fiery in speech as in the colour of his hair, but withal brimful of good humour, made a breezy onslaught on those 'High Art Socialists who designed silk curtains and velvet cushions, and got out hand-printed books bound in Russian leather, which only the idle spongers on the toil of the workers could afford to buy'." (GLASIER, *ibid.*, p. 91).
109. "But as time passed he began to question what seemed to be the contradictions in his life. For his great hope in the future was for 'an art made by the people and for the people as a joy for the maker and the user', and yet the goods he made were beyond the means of simple people. As this questioning pressed on him more and more, he turned towards Socialism, and preaching on the Democracy of Art



- became a part of his life" (May MORRIS, Walthamstow Mss, J. 191).
110. 1st June 1884 (*Letters*, p. 200).
  111. "...the noble class of hangers-on to which I myself belong" (*Misery and the Way Out*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 155). But he adds, in this same lecture, addressing his working-class listeners: "...we despise the class of idle slave-owners above us, whose hangers-on we are: if you distrust us because we are their hangers-on, at least make use of us for the furtherance of the cause" (*Ibid.*, p. 158).
  112. It is to the point to recall that in 1883 Morris had not yet taken up a stand against a policy of palliatives and stepping-stones, and that he shared Hyndman's views on the point.
  113. This letter was published in *The Standard* on 23 November 1883, p. 5/VII (and not the 22nd, as Thompson mistakenly says, p. 367, n. 2); it is reproduced in *Letters*, pp. 190-1, but the last sentence of the letter has been cut by Philip Henderson.
  114. *Letters*, p. 191.
  115. *Justice*, 23 February 1884, p. 6/II.
  116. When Lady Burne-Jones allowed Mackail to publish extracts from Morris's letters, she made a selection, and what became of the letters she kept is not known (cf. THOMPSON, p. 204). – There is more evidence of Morris's doubts in a passage from a letter from G. Wardle to S. Cockerell, 24 August 1898: "...he had ideas of putting the Q[ueen] Sq[uare] business on a profit-sharing basis" (May MORRIS, II, p. 603).
  117. This is an argument which he took up again the following year in connection with social measures that the employers might take: "...thus do we the well-to-do and prosperous dull the sting of conscience. . ." (*Socialism*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, p. 193).
  118. *Letters*, pp. 196-200.
  119. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
  120. *The Journals of Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson*, I, p. 174.
  121. This letter, dated 21 April 1884, appeared as an appendix to an article entitled "A Day in Surrey with William Morris", published in July 1886 by *The Century Magazine*. It was reproduced, following the article in *The Gazette of the John Lewis Partnership*, 17 March 1962, p. 159/II.
  122. MACKAIL, II, p. 135; *Letters*, p. 196; May MORRIS, II, pp. 603-4. G. Wardle explained the system in detail in his manuscript *Memorials* (B.M. Add. Mss. 45 350, p. 31).
  123. *Saturday Review*, 10 January 1885, p. 43/I.
  124. *The Oxford Times*, 28 February 1885, p. 4/VII.
  125. *Cassell's Saturday Journal*, 18 October 1890, p. 81/III.
  126. GLASIER, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 65.
  127. Owen CARROLL: "William Morris among the Reds", *Everyman*, 23 September 1933, p. 351/II.
  128. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 14 December 1889, p. 393/II.
  129. On this subject, see the excellent pages in THOMPSON, pp. 821-2.
  130. *Ibid.*, pp. 822-3. F. Kitz's article appeared in *Freedom* in May 1916.
  131. "Morris was evidently pleased to find himself in a smaller company, and especially, so I thought, on discovering that those present belonged to the working class. He seemed, curiously enough, as I then and on many other occasions noted, when in the company of strangers, to feel more at home and freer when among working men than when among men of his own class" (GLASIER, *op. cit.*, p. 67).
  132. "...a blunderer who had said to the only unconverted man at a Socialist picnic in Dublin, to prove that equality came easy, "I was brought up a gentleman and now as you can see associate with all sorts" and left wounds thereby that rankled after twenty years." (W. B. YEATS, *Autobiographies*, p. 176).
  133. GLASIER, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

134. Cf. *Letters* 1st June 1884, p. 197; the letter to Emma Lazarus (*loc. cit.*, p. 159/II) and the Owen Carroll article already mentioned.
135. *George Wardle's Memorials of William Morris*, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 350, pp. 30-1. Similar evidence is supplied by James Leatham, *William Morris, Master of many Crafts*, pp. 68-9, and by William Clarke in the collection edited by F. Watts Lee, *William Morris, Poet, Artist, Socialist*, p. 19.
136. Cf. the description of it given by Emma Lazarus in the article preceding Morris's letter (*loc. cit.*, pp. 158/I-II, 159/I); see also May MORRIS's memories, C.W., XIII, pp. XXX-XXXII.
137. "I have taught them to make beautiful things, and some of the works which have passed through our hands will last even when our bones have mingled with the dust. I have treated my workmen not as an employer would, but as a comrade" (Owen CARROLL, *ibid.*).
138. MACKAIL, II, p. 135.
139. *Letters*, November 1883, p. 191.
140. "I am more than willing that my riches, such as they are, should be put into the common stock of the nation; and I shall rejoice to work for the community, and give it the benefit of whatever talent or skill I possess, for the same wages that I demand for, and that the nation could afford to pay, under a proper economic and moral system, to every workman – dustman, blacksmith, or bricklayer – in the land" (GLASIER, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10); "whatever advantages we possess over others we are willing and anxious to give up if by so doing we can win a decent life for ourselves and for others" (*Misery and the Way Out*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 157).
141. *The Society of the Future*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 455.
142. "...in my position of a well-to-do man, not suffering from the disabilities which oppress a working man at every step, I feel that I might never have been drawn into the practical side of the question if an ideal had not forced me to seek towards it" (*How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 656).
143. A slight slip on Morris's part: he is her father on p. 169 of the Nonesuch edition, after having been her grandfather throughout the Runnymede episode.
144. Cf.: "Clara...was not unlike a very pleasant and unaffected young lady" (*News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 171). Elsewhere, Morris speaks of her airs of a "town madam" (*Ibid.*, p. 145).
145. "Looking Backward", 1889, May MORRIS, II, pp. 502-3.
146. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 131.
147. *The Pilgrims of Hope*, 1886, Nonesuch, p. 389. We find here a curious justification of René le Senne's theory of the "cathartic intent" of utopia. But the spiritualistic philosopher only considered this "catharsis" in its moral aspect, not taking into account its origin in a very particular social determination (René LE SENNE: *Traité de Morale Générale*, p. 707).
148. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 197. The image could be a memory of the extraordinary description of a threatening storm in *The Ordeal of Richard Fevereal*, 1859, by MEREDITH (ed. J. M. Dent and Sons, pp. 459-60).

### Foreword of Part II

1. *The Art of the People*, 1879, Nonesuch, p. 535.
2. *Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 394.
3. May MORRIS, II, p. 622.
4. MACKAIL, I, p. 219.
5. *Letters*, pp. 244-7.

## Part II, Chapter I

1. *Letters*, p. 244.
2. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 90-1.
3. *Justice and Socialism*, 1885; see Appendix I, p. 579.
4. MACKAIL, II, p. 89. The date is of some interest: a month later Morris discovered and devoured *Capital*.
5. *Letters*, p. 247.
6. *Commonweal*, January 1886, pp. 5/II, 6/I.
7. See the facsimile of the lecture programme published in *Letters*, p. 233.
8. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 68.
9. *More's Utopia: Foreword by William Morris*, May MORRIS, I, p. 289.
10. Thomas MORE, *Utopia* (ed Everyman), p. 51. See *Justice and Socialism*, Appendix I, p. 579.
11. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p; 101.
12. K. MARX, *Capital*, pp. 791 and 808. See also *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 117.
13. "He who runs may read the tale of this change and its miseries in the writings of More and Latimer" (*Architecture and History*, 1884, May MORRIS, I, p. 136); "...the yeomen. . .whose destruction. . .was lamented so touchingly by the high-minded More and the valiant Latimer" (*Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 639); "Two representative Englishmen have left in their writings full tokens of how bitterly this spoliation of the people was felt. Sir Thomas More, one of the most high-minded and cultivated gentlemen of his period, a Catholic and a martyr to his honesty in that cause was one. Hugh Latimer, a yeoman's son, the very type of rough English honesty, a protestant and a martyr to his honesty in that cause was another. . .and now once more it seems as though the axe of More and the faggot of Latimer had still left their spirits with us to produce fruit which they in their life-time, no not even More himself could ever dream would come to pass" (*Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, pp. 107-8).
14. Victor DUPONT: *L'Utopie et le roman utopique dans la littérature anglaise*, pp. 84 et seq.
15. See Appendix I, p. 579.
16. Thomas MORE, *Utopia*, pp. 51-2.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24, 25, 37, 65-6.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-4.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 71-3.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 103-4.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 64. One should not, however, give too much importance to this fact. R. W. CHAMBERS (*Thomas More*, pp. 54-5) points out that the practice of putting children into other houses as pages went on longer in England than on the Continent and occasioned disapproving surprise among foreign visitors.



35. In the introduction to her French edition of *Utopia* (p. 49), Marcelle Bottigelli expresses the opinion that the objection raised by More "is so weak as to appear purely formal". It certainly derives from that skill in dialogue which makes the first part of *Utopia* an extremely lively text.
36. *Utopia*, pp. 63-4.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-9.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
39. R. W. CHAMBERS: *Thomas More*, p. 130.
40. *Utopia*, p. 67.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
42. This short introduction is reproduced in May MORRIS, I, pp. 289-92.
43. E. L. Cary: *William Morris, Poet, Craftsman, Socialist*, pp. 217-8, records a curious anecdote in this connection: "When the *Utopia* appeared with this introduction, an Eton master who had ordered forty copies in advance, intending the books to be used as prizes for the boys in his school, withdrew his order, young England not being allowed at that time to keep such socialistic company."
44. *Utopia*, p. 118.
45. May MORRIS, I, pp. 290-1.
46. *Utopia*, p. 20.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
50. R. W. CHAMBERS: *Thomas More*, p. 347.
51. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 277.
52. MACKAIL, II, pp. 89-90.
53. "Butler's *Erewhon* was a household word" (C.W., XXII, p. XXVII).
54. "...almost the last of the old-style place Utopias" (A. L. MORTON: *The English Utopia*, p. 148).
55. "Take her all in all, however, she was a beneficent and useful deity, who did not care how much she was denied so long as she was obeyed and feared, and who kept hundreds of thousands in those paths which make life tolerably happy, who would never have been kept there otherwise, and over whom a higher and more spiritual ideal would have had no power" (*Erewhon*, p. 121).
56. Cf. J. B. Fort's penetrating judgment: "There are three kinds of connections between the ideas of his books and his personal beliefs: sometimes he expresses himself sincerely: sometimes he deliberately jeers, and his thought is clad in paradox, humour or irony; but elsewhere he juggles with his ideas, and his apparent lack of conviction, although it cannot but add spirit to the game, gives it something unreal and disappointing" (*Samuel Butler*, p. 304).
57. See, for example, J. B. FORT, *ibid.*, p. 116.
58. Cf. H. L. SUSSMAN: *Victorians and the Machine*, pp. 159-60.
59. The very name, an anagram of Morris's "Nowhere", translating More's "Utopia", reveals an intention which is perhaps not purely ironic.
60. THOMPSON, p. 802, n. 2.
61. Ronald FULLER: (*William Morris, Selection and Commentary*, p. 154) does not hesitate to call it a borrowing.
62. J. B. FORT, *ibid.*, p. 32.
63. A curious fact is that Butler incidentally expresses views on artistic problems very close to Morris's, but it would be ridiculous to look for any derivation. Both draw from the same source, that is, the thought of Ruskin. We read in *Erewhon*: "I know not why, but all the noblest arts hold in perfection for a very little moment. They soon reach a height from which they begin to decline, and when they have begun to decline it is a pity they cannot be knocked on the head; for an art is like a living organism - better dead than dying. There is no way of making an aged art young

- again; it must be born anew and grow up from infancy as a new thing, working out its own salvation from effort to effort in all fear and trembling" (pp. 95-6).
64. *Letters*, p. 236.
  65. Edward CARPENTER: *My Days and Dreams*, p. 217. Note in passing that Carpenter made a mistake of one year and set the incident in 1886.
  66. MACKAIL, II, p. 144.
  67. See below, Third Part, Ch. I.
  68. R. JEFFERIES: *After London*, p. 21.
  69. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-19.
  70. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.
  71. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
  72. *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 54, 56. It is probable that the great lake in *After London* is, though in a broader vision, Coate's reservoir, around which move the characters of *Bevis*.
  73. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-4.
  74. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.
  75. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-32.
  76. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-8.
  77. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42.
  78. "...how much stranger it is that any other man, himself a slave, can be found to hunt down or to hang his fellow; yet the tyrants never lack executioners" (*Ibid.*, p. 42).
  79. "He was not a cruel man, nor a benevolent, neither clever nor foolish, neither strong nor weak; simply an ordinary, a very ordinary being, who chanced to sit upon a throne because his ancestors did, and not from any personal superiority" (*Ibid.*, p. 90).
  80. "He had eaten at a slave's table, and sat with him face to face. Theory and practice are often strangely at variance. He felt it an important moment; he felt that he was himself, as it were, on the balance; should he adhere to the ancient prejudice, the ancient exclusiveness of his class, or should he boldly follow the dictate of his mind? He chose the latter and extended his hand to the servant as he rose to say good-bye" (*Ibid.*, p. 202).
  81. "As himself of noble birth, Felix had hitherto seen things only from the point of view of his own class. Now he associated with grooms, he began to see society from *their* point of view, and recognised how feebly it was held together by brute force, intrigue, cord and axe, and woman's flattery" (*Ibid.*, p. 219).
  82. "Felix had never dreamed that common and illiterate men, such as these grooms and retainers, could have any conception of reasons of State, or the crafty designs of courts. He now found that, though they could neither write nor read, they had learned the art of reading man (the worst and lowest side of character) to such perfection that they at once detected the motive" (*Ibid.*, p. 220).
  83. "Felix thought that he was himself a hunter, and understood woodcraft; he now found how mistaken he had been. He had acquired woodcraft as a gentleman; he now learned the knave's woodcraft. They taught him a hundred tricks of which he had had no idea" (*Ibid.*).
  84. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.
  85. *Ibid.*, pp. 44; 62.
  86. "Indeed, we have fuller knowledge of those extremely ancient times than of the people who immediately preceded us, and the Romans and Greeks are more familiar to us than the men who rode in the iron chariots and mounted to the skies" (*Ibid.*, p. 24).
  87. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.
  88. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
  89. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
  90. "...the extraordinary fertility of the enclosure, and the variety of the products.

- There was everything; fruit of all kinds, herbs of every species, plots specially devoted to those possessing medicinal virtues. This was only one part of the gardens; the orchards proper were farther down, and the flowers nearer the house" (*Ibid.*).
91. "These buildings were put together with wooden pins, on account of the scarcity of iron, and were all (dwellinghouse included) roofed with red tile. Lesser houses, cottages, and sheds at a distance were thatched, but in an enclosure tiles were necessary, lest, in case of an attack, fire should be thrown" (*Ibid.*, p. 70).
  92. "In the front there were originally only two rooms, extensive for those old days, but not sufficiently so for ours" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).
  93. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
  94. "...he was an expert and artistic workman, and his table and his seat, unlike the rude blocks in Felix's room, were tastefully carved" (*Ibid.*, p. 71).
  95. "This chest, though small, was extremely heavy and strong, being dug out with the chisel and gouge from a solid block of oak. Except a few parallel grooves, there was no attempt at ornamentation upon it" (*Ibid.*, p. 59).
  96. "The glass made now is not transparent, but merely translucent; it indeed admits light after a fashion, but it is thick and cannot be seen through" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).
  97. "The elders and their chief, not to be distinguished by dress or ornament from the rest..." (*Ibid.*, p. 283).
  98. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
  99. A. L. MORTON: *The English Utopia*, p. 158.
  100. "...the underlying pessimism of Jefferies", says Jessie KOCMANOVA: *The Aesthetic Purpose of William Morris in the Context of his Late Prose Romances*, p. 124.
  101. To J. Bruce Glasier, 13 May 1889, *Letters*, p. 315.
  102. Cf. Arthur E. MORGAN: *Edward Bellamy*, pp IX, 172, 230, 247.
  103. May MORRIS, I, p. 503.
  104. Cf. Henry PELLING: *The Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 101.
  105. This article, simply entitled "Looking Backward" (*Commonweal*, 22 June, 1889, p. 194/I-II, 195/I), is reproduced in May MORRIS, II, pp. 501-7. In order to avoid any confusion in references, I shall quote the title of Bellamy's novel when I am referring the reader to it and simply mention May Morris's work when referring to the article.
  106. "...the author has sought to alleviate the instructive quality of the book by casting it in the form of a romantic narrative, which he would be glad to fancy not wholly devoid of interest on its own account" (*Looking Backward*, Preface, p. 2).
  107. May MORRIS, II, pp. 501-2.
  108. V. DUPONT: *L'Utopie et le roman utopique dans la littérature anglaise*, p. 754.
  109. *Ibid.*, p. 758. It is reasonable to observe that this lack of characterisation is common to most utopias, apart from Morris's. As H. G. Wells very aptly remarked: "In almost every Utopia – except, perhaps, Morris's *News from Nowhere* – one sees... a multitude of people, healthy, happy, beautifully dressed, but without any personal distinction whatever" (*A Modern Utopia*, p. 9).
  110. *Looking Backward*, ch. VIII, pp. 27-8.
  111. We may note, in passing, that according to Bellamy, the United States were to play the pioneer role in evolution. As we shall see, Morris had very different ideas on the point. (*Looking Backward*, ch. VIII, p. 50).
  112. May MORRIS, II, p. 507.
  113. *Ibid.*, p. 502.
  114. *Looking Backward*, p. 4.
  115. *Ibid.*, ch. XXVIII.
  116. May MORRIS, II, p. 502.
  117. *Ibid.*, p. 504.
  118. *Ibid.*
  119. *Looking Backward*, ch. V, p. 20.



120. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
121. May MORRIS, II, p. 503.
122. *Looking Backward*, *ibid.*, p. 18.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
124. Cf. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, p. 258.
125. "Where Are We Now?" *Commonweal*, 15 November 1890, p. 362/I; May MORRIS, II, p. 517.
126. *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, p. 160.
127. Cf. E. R. PEASE: *The History of the Fabian Society*, p. 89.
128. A. E. MORGAN, pp. 258-9, offers us a choice of very significant quotations on this point.
129. V. DUPONT, *ibid.*, p. 788. In his introduction to the (Aubier) bilingual edition of *Nouvelles de nulle part* (p. 69), he repeats that Bellamy's utopia is "strongly inspired by Marxism".
130. Cf. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, pp. 372-4.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
132. *Looking Backward*, ch. XXIV, p. 90. In an article published in *The Nationalist* (December 1889) Bellamy significantly writes: "Nationalism is not a class movement; it is a citizens' movement . . . prudence and conservatism are called for on the part of those identified with it". This article is reproduced almost in its entirety by A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, pp. 253-5.
133. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
134. May MORRIS, II, p. 504.
135. "Fabian Essays in Socialism", *Commonweal*, 15 January 1890, p. 29/I.
136. *Looking Backward*, ch. VI, p. 23.
137. *Ibid.*, ch. XII, p. 44.
138. *Ibid.*, ch. XVII, pp. 66-8.
139. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, pp. 91-3.
140. *Ibid.*, ch. XII, p. 46.
141. *Ibid.*, ch. XII, p. 45.
142. *Ibid.*, ch. XXII, p. 86.
143. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, p. 41.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 321.
145. *Looking Backward*, ch. XXVIII, p. 115.
146. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, pp. 248-9.
147. May MORRIS, II, p. 504.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 503; cf. C.W. XVI, p. XXVIII.
149. *Looking Backward*, ch. XVII, p. 65.
150. *Ibid.*, ch. X.
151. After his setback at West Point, Bellamy had tried the Bar and rapidly left, disgusted by the unscrupulousness of the profession (cf. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, pp. 117-20).
152. *Looking Backward*, ch. XIX, p. 74.
153. May MORRIS, II, pp. 506-7.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
155. *Ibid.*, p. 504.
156. *Looking Backward*, Preface, p. 2.
157. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
158. My italics; in fact, this is the key word of Morris's criticism.
159. May MORRIS, II, p. 507.
160. *Ibid.*, p. 502.
161. *Looking Backward*, Preface, p. 2.
162. *Ibid.*, ch. XI, p. 41.
163. *Ibid.*, ch. XVIII, p. 69.

164. May MORRIS, II, p. 505.
165. As early as 1874, Bellamy wrote: "A man's profession should always be incidental and subordinate to himself, never the chief thing to be said about him" (quoted by A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, p. 75).
166. *Looking Backward*, ch. VII, pp. 24-6.
167. May MORRIS, II, p. 507.
168. *Ibid.*
169. *Looking Backward*, ch. XII, p. 46.
170. *Ibid.*, ch. VII, p. 25.
171. *Ibid.*, ch. IX, p. 35.
172. *Ibid.*, ch. XII, p. 45.
173. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, p. 96.
174. May MORRIS, II, p. 506.
175. *Looking Backward*, ch. X, p. 38.
176. *Ibid.*, ch. XI, p. 42.
177. *Ibid.*, ch. XIV, p. 54.
178. *Ibid.*, ch. XI, pp. 39-41; ch. XIII, p. 49; ch. XXVI, p. 97.
179. A. L. MORTON: *The English Utopia*, p. 165.
180. L. MUMFORD: *The Story of Utopias*, p. 5.
181. May MORRIS, II, pp. 505-6.
182. *Looking Backward*, ch. XI, p. 42.
183. *Ibid.*, ch. XVII, p. 64.
184. May MORRIS, *ibid.*
185. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, p. 95.
186. A. COMPTON-RICKETT: *William Morris, a Study in Personality*, p. 192.
187. May MORRIS, II, p. 505.
188. *Looking Backward*, ch. XIV, p. 56.
189. *Ibid.*, ch. XXI, p. 77.
190. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
191. *Ibid.*, ch. XVI, p. 62.
192. *Ibid.*, ch. IX, p. 35.
193. *Ibid.*, ch. V, p. 17.
194. *Ibid.*, ch. XIV, p. 55.
195. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, p. 93.
196. A. L. MORTON: *The English Utopia*, p. 152.
197. Quoted by A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, p. 249.
198. May MORRIS, II, pp. 502-3.
199. *Ibid.*, p. 502.
200. *Looking Backward*, ch. X, p. 36.
201. *Ibid.*, ch. III, p. 14.
202. *Ibid.*, ch. XIV, p. 56; ch. XXII, p. 87.
203. *Ibid.*, ch. XI, p. 42.
204. *Ibid.*, ch. IV, p. 16.
205. *Ibid.*, ch. I, p. 5; ch. IV, p. 15.
206. May MORRIS, II, p. 507.
207. *Looking Backward*, ch. XXI, p. 79.
208. *Ibid.*, ch. IV, p. 16.
209. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, p. 92.
210. *Ibid.*, ch. XVIII, p. 70.
211. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, p. 92.
212. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
213. *Ibid.*, ch. XXVII, p. 107.
214. *Ibid.*, ch. XXV, pp. 95-6.
215. "Human nature itself must have changed very much," I said. "Not at all," was

Dr. Leete's reply, "but the conditions of life have changed, and with them the motives of human action" (*Looking Backward*, ch. VI, p. 22); "I don't think there has been any change in human nature, in that respect, since your day" (*Ibid.*, ch. IX, p. 35).

216. *Ibid.*, ch. XII, p. 47.
217. Cf. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, pp. 58, 254.
218. *Looking Backward*, ch. XXVI, p. 102.
219. Cf. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, p. 59.
220. *Looking Backward*, ch. XXVI, p. 101.
221. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
222. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
223. A. E. MORGAN, *ibid.*, pp. 260-75.
224. Cf. MACKAIL, II, p. 244.
225. To J. Bruce Glasier, 5 December 1890, *Letters*, p. 330.
226. Bulwer LYTTON: *The Coming Race*, pp. 155-6.

## Part II, Chapter II.

1. See *The Beauty of Life*, 1880, Nonesuch, pp. 545-6; *The Gothic Revival*, I, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 72; *Preface to Medieval Lore* by Robert Steele, 1893, May MORRIS, I, p. 287; *An Address delivered at the Distribution of Prizes to Students of the Birmingham Municipal School of Arts*, 1894, C.W., XXII, p. 431.
2. *The Beauty of Life*, *ibid.*
3. It is on this very point that Morris's admiration for Scott plainly differs from that felt by Ruskin, who could not refrain from making certain reservations: "Nothing is more notable or sorrowful in Scott's mind than its incapacity of steady belief in anything" (*Modern Painters*, Part IV, ch. XVI, §31, *Works*, V, p. 336).
4. In 1892 Morris confided to Cockerell: "our clique was much influenced by Keats, who was a poet who represented semblances, as opposed to Shelley who had no eyes, and whose admiration was not critical but conventional" (C.W. XXII, p. XXI).
5. In his book on *La Peinture anglaise* (p. 240), M.J.-J. Mayoux correctly points out that it is a misconception to confuse Rossetti with Pre-Raphaelitism.
6. To Andreas Scheu, 5 September 1883, *Letters*, p. 186.
7. In order to avoid long digressions which would overweight the analysis and break its unity, I refer the reader to chapters I and X of Part Three, where a study of these important themes will more naturally find a place.
8. Cf. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, pp. 50-1.
9. I would add to the great deal of evidence already published on this point a curious find I made in the archives of the Socialist League, kept at the International Institute of Social History (I.I.S.G.) in Amsterdam. In a memo sent to the chief editor of *Commonweal* on 30 September 1885, Georgiana Burne-Jones asks that the publication should be addressed to "Mrs. Burne-Jones, not to Mr." (f. 981).
10. *The Beauty of Life*, 1880, Nonesuch, p. 546.
11. *Address on the Collection of Paintings of the English Pre-Raphaelite School in the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, 1891, May MORRIS, I, pp. 296-310.
12. *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy*, *ibid.*, pp. 239-40.
13. Graham HOUGH: *The Last Romantics*, p. 56; RUSKIN: *Modern Painters*, Part IV, ch. IV, §18. In fact, Ruskin's volte-face took place earlier. Graham Hough appears to forget that *The Stones of Venice* was published from 1851 to 1853, and that *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1851) contained strictures on artistic norms based upon Raphael's example.
14. William BLAKE: *On Vergil (Poetry and Prose)*, ed. Nonesuch, 1946, p. 583.



15. *The Beauty of Life*, 1880, Nonesuch, p. 545.
16. *The Gothic Revival*, II, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 75.
17. *Commonweal*, 5 February 1887, p. 43/II.
18. *Ibid.*, 21 July 1888, p. 229/I.
19. *Ibid.*, 17 November 1888, p. 365/II.
20. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1889, p. 379/II.
21. *Letters*, p. 246. In any case, Morris was more understanding than his master Ruskin, who wrote: "Blake was sincere, but full of wild creeds, and somewhat diseased in brain" (*Modern Painters*, Part IV, ch. XVI, § 10, n., *Works*, V, p. 323).
22. THOMPSON, pp. 307 and 354.
23. *Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society, Kensington Vestry Hall*, 1881, May MORRIS, I, p. 195.
24. C.W., XXII, pp. XVII and XVIII, XXIII-XXIV; MACKAIL, I, p. 220; *Makeshift*, 1894, May MORRIS, II, p. 470.
25. To Jane Alice Morris, 4 September 1883, *Letters*, p. 183.
26. To the Editor, *The Daily News*, 14 August 1883, *ibid.*, p. 179.
27. LE MIRE, p. 34 of typewritten edition.
28. *Rural Rides*, p. 230.
29. I was surprised (relatively speaking, because this is a habit of Disraeli's) to notice that chapter V of book II of *Sybil*, the one containing the famous definition of the "two nations", was, in all its first part dealing with the rôle of monastic institutions before the Reformation, an almost literal transcription of various passages in *Rural Rides*. And it is not just a simple coincidence: Disraeli, in chapter XVI of the same book II, cites Cobbett, with Shakespeare, as one of the masters of the English language. There is room for surprise that Morris, supposed to have known Cobbett's book "by heart", did not denounce this plagiarism, since he felt real hatred for Disraeli and for his imperialist policy (cf. May MORRIS, II, pp. 119 and 604). So it is probable that he had not read, or had only skimmed, *Sybil* (a book to which he never referred), and that it should be excluded from our quest for his mediaevalist inspirations.
30. *Advice to Young Men* (COBBETT, *Selections*, ed. Hughes, p. 147).
31. *Cottage Economy*, *passim*.
32. *Rural Rides*, pp. 125 and 127.
33. See particularly *Rural Rides*, pp. 190-1.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
35. *A History of the Protestant Reformation* (COBBETT: *Selections*, p. 166).
36. *Rural Rides*, p. 369.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
38. *Ibid.*, (COBBETT: *Selections*, p. 110; the Penguin edition reproduces the original 1830 edition and takes no account of the second edition, completed in 1853 by John Paul Cobbett). Cf.: "...along with William Cobbett, contrast the dungeon-like propriety of St. Paul's...with the free imagination and delicate beauty of the people-built Gothic churches..." ("Artist and Artisan", *Commonweal*, 10 September 1887; p. 291/II; May MORRIS, II, p. 495).
39. See, for example, *Rural Rides*, pp. 264-5. Cf.: "That is an old and hackneyed password of Cobbett's, but is always good and necessarily true: 'House of Commons - den of thieves'." ("Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 13 April 1889, p. 281/II).
40. *Ibid.*, p. 479.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 401.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1, 128, 135, 188.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 115, 167.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 319.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
54. *Political Register*, XXXIV, column 1019.
55. *Rural Rides*, p. 320.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
57. *Political Register*, XLV, column 480.
58. *Ibid.*, XLVII, column 91.
59. *Cottage Economy*, *passim* and particularly § 77.
60. Cf. "I recommend you to read William Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*, both because it is a very charming and amusing little book, and because it gives us in its contrast between now and then a good measure of the rapid advance of makeshift in this detail of life" (*Makeshift*, 1894, May MORRIS, II, p. 470).
61. *Rural Rides*, p. 173.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
63. *Rural Rides*, p. 14.
64. *Political Register*, XXXII, column 1076.
65. *Cottage Economy*, § 11 and 12.
66. *Political Register*, XI, column 36.
67. *Ibid.*, XXXII, column 1076.
68. *Advice to Young Men* (COBBETT, *Selections*, pp. 145-6).
69. *Political Register*, XXXII, column 1076.
70. *Advice to Young Men*, *ibid.*, p. 63.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
73. Cf. Raymond WILLIAMS, *Culture and Society*, p. 37.
74. Cf. *Rural Rides*, pp. 120, 200-1.
75. *Political Register*, XXX, column 433.
76. *Rural Rides*, pp. 171, 183.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 497.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.
79. *Cottage Economy*, § 16.
80. *Rural Rides*, p. 45.
81. "William Cobbett asks this pertinent question: 'What is a slave?' and answers it thus, 'a slave is a man without property'. (*Communism, i.e. Property*, 1892, May MORRIS, II, p. 347): 'A good man will be contented fast enough if he be fed and clothed sufficiently, but if a man be not well fed and clad, he is a base wretch to be contented.' So says William Cobbett, and certainly the strikers might have one more banner with this inscription written on it" ("The Lesson of the Hour", *Commonweal*, 7 September 1889, p. 281/II).
82. *A History of the Protestant Reformation* (COBBETT, *Selections*, p. 165).
83. *Rural Rides*, p. 38.
84. *Political Register*, XXXIV, column 1019.
85. *Ibid.*, XXX, column 433.
86. This is precisely Marx's complaint about Cobbett (*Capital*, p. 829), although he refers to him more than once and readily adopts his expressions.
87. *Political Register*, LXXXII, column 624.
88. *Ibid.*, XXX, column 433.
89. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 175-6.

90. Margaret R. GRENNAN: *William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary*, ch. IV. See also the article by Charles H. KEGEL: *William Morris's A Dream of John Ball: A Study in Reactionary Liberalism* (*Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Art and Letters*, vol. XI, 1955).
91. To Andreas Scheu, 5 September 1883, *Letters*, p. 185.
92. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 21 August 1883, *ibid.*, p. 180.
93. B.M. Add. Mss. 52 772, f. 23.
94. *Address at the 12th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, 1889, May MORRIS, I, p. 148.
95. *The Arts and Crafts of To-day*, 1889, JACKSON, p. 241.
96. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 498.
97. *Paper Read at the 7th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, 1884, May MORRIS, I, p. 125.
98. "Why We Celebrate the Commune of Paris", *Commonweal*, 19 March 1887, p. 89/II.
99. *The Political Outlook*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 282. Cf.: "...the dull and not too veracious accounts of kings and nobles, that used to do for history". (To the Editor, *Daily Chronicle*, 4 October 1895, *Letters*, pp. 376-7); "...what so-called history has left us of the tale of those days – the stupid languor and the evil deeds of kings and scoundrels" (*The Art of the People*, 1879, Nonesuch, p. 520); "The written history of 'Kings and Scoundrels' is made up of the deeds of the greedy few ruling arbitrarily; while the history of art is made up of the deeds of the patient many living naturally" (*Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 385).
100. *Paper Read at the 7th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, 1884, May MORRIS, I, p. 125.
101. Cf. C.W., XXII, p. XXVI.
102. *Art and the Beauty of the Earth*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 158.
103. *Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, 1880, May MORRIS, II, p. 67.
104. *Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 108.
105. On this subject I have made good use of the studies of G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, and of J. R. Hale, *The Evolution of British Historiography*. See also Le Mire, pp. 34-7 (of the typewritten edition) and *passim*.
106. To the Editor, *The Athenaeum*, 5 March 1877, *Letters*, p. 85.
107. To the Editor, *The Daily Chronicle*, 4 October 1895, *ibid.*, p. 376.
108. Cf. LE MIRE, p. 105, n. 10 and J. R. Hale, *ibid.*, p. 56.
109. *Art and Labour*, *ibid.*, pp. 105-6.
110. *Gothic Architecture*, 1889, Nonesuch, p. 485.
111. *The Gothic Revival*, I, 1884, LE MIRE, pp. 55-6.
112. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 76.
113. G. P. GOOCH, *ibid.*, p. 323.
114. *The Revival of Architecture*, 1888, C.W., XXII, p. 319.
115. *Art and its Producers*, 1888, JACKSON, p. 212.
116. G. P. GOOCH, *ibid.*, p. 330.
117. Cf. THOMPSON, pp. 245, 255, 456.
118. K. MARX: *Capital*, pp. 740 n. 1; 745 and n. 3; 794, n. 1.
119. Cf. Wal HANNINGTON: *Never on our Knees*, p. 33; H. PELLING, *Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 82. May MORRIS, (II, p. 75) oddly links the names of Karl Marx and Thorold Rogers as educators of the new generation in economic matters.
120. Cf. M. GRENNAN: *William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary*, pp. 88-96.
121. Th. ROGERS: *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, pp. 183-4.
122. *Paper Read at the 7th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, May MORRIS, I, p. 134.
123. To Andreas Scheu, 5 September 1883, *Letters*, p. 185.
124. C.W., XXII, p. XXVI.
125. *Ibid.*, p. XXXI.
126. *Letters*, pp. 173 and 175. A detail of which it is difficult to assess the interest: C. E. Maurice was the author of a book entitled *English Popular Leaders*, one chapter of which was devoted to John Ball.



127. Cf. Charles E. RAVEN: *Christian Socialism*, pp. 182-224.
128. "I do not think my father had met him," writes May Morris (C.W., XIV, p. XXIII).
129. See *Letters*, pp. 87, 121-2; May MORRIS, I, pp. 81, 117; MACKAIL, I, p. 346. I found a completely different version of this episode in the papers of A. H. Mackmurdo (Walthamstow Mss, J. 361), who writes: "I was requested to ask him (Carlyle) to join the 'anti-scrape' society as the S.P.A.B. was called when first started. I asked him to join it. He knew my admiration of Wren's work. 'I suppose you want to preserve those cold naked city churches of Wren. I'll have nothing to do with it.' I got him however to join it and he became the first President". This strange account, which cannot be checked, seems very suspect to me, because there is no doubt that Carlyle had a great admiration for Wren; see, for example, *Past and Present*, pp. 129 and 191. In any event, this evidence poses a problem.
130. *Letters*, p. 247.
131. MACKAIL, I, p. 38.
132. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 1881, *Letters*, p. 149. However, May Morris writes: "...Carlyle, the humours of whose great Frederick afforded our poet such constant entertainment" (C.W., XXII, p. XXVI). The contradiction is bizarre. All in all, it is better to rely upon Morris's own evidence.
133. *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, p. 116.
134. "The law of maximum was now passed...so that, as Carlyle remarks, the workman was at least better off under the Terror than he had ever been before" (*Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 154).
135. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 1181 and 23 August 1882, *Letters*, pp. 148 and 160.
136. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 657.
137. CARLYLE: *Chartism*, ch. VI, *Works*, vol. XXIV, p. 156.
138. *Past and Present*, p. 164. In the case of this work, to which I shall refer most frequently, I have thought it more suitable to refer to the Everyman edition rather than the complete works.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
140. *Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century*, 1887, C.W., XXII, p. 389. Cf. H. L. SUSSMAN: *Victorians and the Machine*, p. 130.
141. *Past and Present*, p. 143.
142. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
143. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
144. *Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, 1880, May MORRIS, II, p. 69.
145. *Past and Present*, pp. 146-7.
146. "The utterly base doctrine, as Carlyle has it, that this world is a cockney nightmare, would be known no more" (*The Society of the Future*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 467).
147. *Past and Present*, p. 264.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 65. Cf.: "It (the bourgeoisie) has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors', and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'". (MARX and ENGELS, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 16).
149. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-6.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
151. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.
152. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
154. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-1.
155. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
156. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
157. *Ibid.*, p. 58. Cf. p. 64.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

159. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
160. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
161. *Latter-day Pamphlets, Works*, vol. XX, pp. 1-2.
162. *Past and Present*, p. 23.
163. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
164. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
165. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-8.
166. "Reviews and Notices", *Commonweal*, May 1885, p. 33/II.
167. "Notes on Passing Events", *Commonweal*, 5 June 1886, p. 73/II.
168. *On Heroes and Hero-Worship, Works*, vol. V. p. I.
169. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
170. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
171. *Past and Present*, p. 235.
172. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
173. "Notes on Passing Events", *Commonweal*, 8 May 1886, p. 41/I. In his diary, Cobden-Sanderson relates a conversation on 1st April 1884: "We then got on to hero-worship, which Morris denounced. . ." (*Journals of T. J. Cobden-Sanderson*), vol. I, p. 180).
174. "Fancy a Carlylean aristocracy of talent, the country under the benevolent rule of Senior Wranglers and LL.D.'s! (J. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of The Socialist Movement*, p. 101).
175. *Past and Present*, p. 156.
176. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
177. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
178. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
179. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-2.
180. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
181. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
182. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-3.
183. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
184. *Works*, vol. XXIX, ch. VIII.
185. *Past and Present*, p. 200.
186. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
187. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
188. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
189. *Ibid.*, pp. 261, 263. Morris takes up the expression, but only to write: "I say further that the worst tyrants of the days of violence were but feeble tormentors compared with those Captains of Industry who have taken the pleasure of work away from the workmen" (*The Revival of Handicraft*, 1888 JACKSON, p. 225).
190. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
191. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
192. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
193. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
194. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
195. *Latter-day Pamphlets, Works*, vol. XX, pp. 36, 166.
196. Study entitled *La Littérature et l'art dans l'oeuvre de Marx et d'Engels*, introducing a selection of passages: K. Marx et F. Engels, *Sur la littérature et l'art*, p. 78.
197. MARX and ENGELS: *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 36-7.
198. *Past and Present*, , p. 147.
199. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
200. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
201. *On Heroes and Hero-Worship, Works*, vol V, p. 70.
202. *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 603.
203. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 36.

204. To Mrs. William Morris, 10 February 1881, *Letters*, p. 143.
205. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 23 August 1882, *ibid.*, p. 160.
206. *Id.*, 1881, *ibid.*, p. 148.
207. Margaret Grennan notes a typical fact in connection with Carlyle's use of sources in *Past and Present*: "Art is hardly mentioned, and it is significant that Carlyle ignores in his source a detail that Morris would have eagerly grasped: Abbot Samson himself designs the murals and texts for St. Edmund's shrine" (*William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary*, p. 15).
208. YEATS: *Autobiographies*, p. 180.
209. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 657.
210. May MORRIS, II, p. 584.
211. *Modern Painters, Works*, vol V, pp. 427 and 428.
212. John D. ROSENBERG: *The Darkening Glass*, p. 141, n. 6.
213. In particular, see Appendix XII of Book I, entitled *Romanist Modern Art*.
214. "It is also often said that I borrow from Pugin. I glanced at Pugin's *Contrasts* once, in the Oxford architectural reading room, during an idle forenoon. . . I never read a word of any other of his works, not feeling, from the style of his architecture, the smallest interest in his opinions"; "I certainly owe nothing to Pugin. . ." (*Modern Painters, Works*, vol. V, pp. 428-9).
215. To Andreas Scheu, 5 September 1883, *Letters*, p. 185.
216. *The Revival of Architecture*, C.W., XXII, p. 328; *Letters*, p. 76 ("... a gimcrack palace of Pugin's, Alton Towers. . .").
217. See, in particular, Graham HOUGH: *The Last Romantics*, pp. 88-92.
218. *The Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, p. 147.
219. MACKAIL, I, p. 89.
220. May MORRIS, I, p. 70. In a letter of 1857, reproduced in facsimile by the *Journal of the William Morris Society* (vol. II, n<sup>o</sup>. I, Spring 1966, p. 2), Ruskin compares Morris with the illuminators of the thirteenth century.
221. *The Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, p. 168.
222. C.W., II, p. XVII.
223. *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, II, pp. 524, 679, 693; III, pp. 845, 1051.
224. See, for example, a letter written by Morris in 1875 to Fairfax C. Murray (C.W., XI, p. XXVI).
225. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 496.
226. The letter is addressed to "My dear Ruskin"; 10 July 1877, *Letters*, p. 93. Cf. *Report of the SPAB, 1st Annual Meeting*, May MORRIS, I, p. 116.
227. To the Rev. H. G. Woods, 7 December 1881, Bodleian Lib. Mss. Don. d. 113, f. 78.
228. *Address at the 12th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, May MORRIS, I, p. 149.
229. C.W., XVI, p. XVIII. Alfred Noyes (*William Morris*, p. 129), confusing two incidents having nothing in common, dates this letter 1888.
230. To J. Ruskin, 15 April 1883, *Letters*, pp. 168-9. Cf. C.W., XIII, pp. XXXIII-IV.
231. "... What I remember of it is that Ruskin, no doubt with his usual exquisite tact, quietly insisted that Morris was entirely right", wrote Henry W. Nevinson in the review of a book on Morris by P. Bloomfield (*The New Statesman and Nation*, 10 March 1934, p. 356/II).
232. B.M. Add. Mss, 52 751. Cf. Viola Meynell, *Friends of a Life-Time*, pp. 31 and 59-60.
233. Cf. May Morris's evidence: "My father's affection for Ruskin never altered as the years passed" (May MORRIS, I, p. 89).
234. *Ibid.*
235. *The Beauty of Life*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 546.
236. *Ibid.* Cf. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 496, and *The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 262.



237. *Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, p. 140.
238. MACKAIL, I, pp. 38 and 46.
239. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
240. C.W., XXII, p. XXXI. Cf. *The Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, p. 85.
241. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 496.
242. *The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 262.
243. *The Revival of Architecture*, 1888, C.W., XXII, p. 323.
244. May MORRIS, I, pp. 292-5.
245. C.W., XVI, p. XVII.
246. *Sydney Cockerell's Diaries*. B.M. Add. Mss. 52 772 (28); C.W., XIV, pp. XVI-XVII.
247. MACKAIL, II, p. 201.
248. *The Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, p. 99; MACKAIL, I, p. 39.
249. *Sydney Cockerell's Diaries*, *ibid.*, (34).
250. *Fors Clavigera* figures in Sotheby's sale catalogue of Morris's library in December 1898.
251. Part II, sect. VI, ch. III, § 21.
252. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, III, § 2; IV, § 2.
253. *The Stones of Venice*, I, II, § 14.
254. *Ibid.*, II, V, § 14.
255. *Ibid.*, I, XX, § 19.
256. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, I, § 8.
257. *The Stones of Venice*, I, XX, § 33; II, VI, § 64.
258. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 78.
259. *Ibid.*, I, XXX, § 1.
260. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 62. Cf. *Modern Painters*, Pt. V, ch. I, § 12, n.
261. *The Elements of Drawing*, III, § 182.
262. *The Stones of Venice*, II, V, § 30-2; VI, § 37, 54.
263. John D. ROSENBERG: *The Darkening Glass*, p. 6.
264. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. XVI, § 28.
265. MACKAIL, I, p. 220.
266. II, VI, § 56, 57.
267. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. II, § 8.
268. *Ibid.*, ch. XVII, § 32.
269. *The Stones of Venice*, I, II, § 14.
270. *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, II, p. 547. Cf. John D. ROSENBERG: "The Geopoetry of John Ruskin" in *Etudes anglaises*, January-March 1969, pp. 42-7.
271. *Praeterita*, II, § 200.
272. *The Stones of Venice*, III, II, § 15.
273. *Ibid.*, § 13.
274. *Ibid.*, § 26.
275. *Modern Painters*, Pt. V, ch. II, § 21.
276. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 8.
277. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 5, § 15, 16.
278. *Ibid.*, Letter 44, § 4, 5.
279. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, IV, § 21.
280. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. XVII, § 35.
281. *Munera Pulveris*, *Works*, vol. XVII, p. 156. On this subject, cf. Chapter III of H. L. SUSSMAN's book: *Victorians and the Machine*.
282. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 67, § 18. Cf. Letter 44, § 13.
283. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, IV, § 159-60. Cf. *ibid.*, III, § 124.
284. *The Stones of Venice*, I, App. 17.
285. *The Political Economy of Art*, pp. 3-4. For convenience of reference, I refer, rather than to the 39 volumes of the *Works*, to the Everyman edition of this work, which also contains *Unto this Last*; the same naturally applies to that work also.

286. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
287. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
288. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 17, 18; III, I, § 46.
289. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 42.
290. *The Stones of Venice*, III, IV, § 31, 32.
291. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 34.
292. *The Stones of Venice*, II, II, § 4.
293. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 103.
294. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
295. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
296. *Unto this Last*, p. 193.
297. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
298. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 2.
299. *Munera Pulveris*, § 11.
300. *Unto this Last*, p. 134.
301. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
302. *Munera Pulveris*, § 34.
303. Cf. "I don't know that I can do better than quote John Ruskin on this point: property, he says, is something which is good in itself, which you have acquired justly, and which you can use rightly" (*The End and the Means*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 422).
304. *Unto this Last*, p. 133.
305. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
306. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
307. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
308. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.
309. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
310. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
311. *Ibid.*, 185.
312. *The Stones of Venice*, I, I, § 38.
313. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 30.
314. *Ibid.*, I, XXX, § 6.
315. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting, Addenda*, § 59, 60, 61.
316. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 40.
317. *Ibid.*, § 28.
318. *Lectures on Art, Works*, vol. XX, p. 39.
319. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, II, § 54.
320. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 8.
321. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, VI, § 2 and 7.
322. *The Stones of Venice*, I, I, § 2.
323. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, IV, § 111. My italics (P.M.).
324. *The Revival of Architecture*, 1888, C.W., XXII, p. 323. My italics (P.M.).
325. *Shakespeare: The Tempest*, I, II.
326. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 9.
327. *Ibid.*, § 26.
328. *Ibid.*, V, § 20.
329. *Ibid.*, I, I, § 36.
330. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. IV, § 17 and 18.
331. *The Stones of Venice*, I, XX, § 3-10.
332. *Ibid.*, § 31.
333. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 101, 103.
334. *Ibid.*, II, IV, § 62.
335. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 5-8.
336. *Ibid.*, I, V, § 7. Cf. III, II, § 56.
337. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 37-42.

338. *Ibid.*, § 46 and 78.
339. *Ibid.*, III, III, § 52.
340. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 86-7.
341. *Ibid.*, I, XX, § 16.
342. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 31-2.
343. *Pre-Raphaelitism*, § 16, (*Works*, XII, pp. 353/4).
344. *The Stones of Venice*, III, I, § 20.
345. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 9, n. 1.
346. *Ibid.*, II, V, § 32.
347. *Ibid.*, III, I, § 24.
348. *Ibid.*, I, I, § 39.
349. *Ibid.*, III, I, § 2.
350. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, I, § 3.
351. *The Stones of Venice*, III, IV, § 35.
352. *Ibid.*, III, I, § 16, 17, 21.
353. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 89.
354. *Ibid.*, § 33.
355. M. GRENNAN: *William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary*, p. 17.
356. *The Revival of Architecture*, 1888, C.W., XXII, p. 323.
357. An entire chapter of *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome* is entitled: *The Rough Side of the Middle Ages*.
358. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 13.
359. *The Crown of Wild Olive, Intro.*, § 6.
360. J. D. ROSENBERG: *The Darkening Glass*, p. 87.
361. *Fors Clavigera, Works*, vol. XXVII, Letter III, § 4.
362. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. XVI, § 16.
363. *Ibid.*, ch. XIV, § 2.
364. *The Stones of Venice*, III, I, § 1.
365. *Ibid.*, II, IV, § 52.
366. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, VI, § 5.
367. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 4.
368. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, V, § 3 and 5.
369. *The Two Paths*, Preface.
370. *The Stones of Venice*, I, Preface to the Third Edition.
371. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 173.
372. *The Stones of Venice*, III, II, § 3.
373. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 31 and 38.
374. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, II, § 55.
375. *Ibid.*, I, § 25.
376. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Preface to the Second Edition.
377. *Ibid.*, VII, § 7.
378. *The Stones of Venice*, III, IV, § 36.
379. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, II, § 61.
380. *The Stones of Venice, ibid.*
381. May MORRIS, I, p. 294. Similarly, note that when he cites the works of Ruskin among his favourite reading in reply to the *Pall Mall Gazette* enquiry, he feels it necessary to add in parentheses: "especially the ethical and politico-economical parts of them" (*Letters*, p. 247).
382. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 3.
383. *Ibid.*, § 8.
384. *Ibid.*, § 75.
385. *Ibid.*, § 76.
386. *Ibid.*, § 7.
387. *Ibid.*, § 40. Earlier, in *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, IX, § 6, he had written: "God alone can finish".



388. *Ibid.*, § 10.
389. *Ibid.*, § 11.
390. *Ibid.*, § 10.
391. *Ibid.*, I, XXI, § 13.
392. *Ibid.*, § 11 and 14.
393. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 11-14.
394. *Ibid.*, § 16.
395. *Ibid.*, § 21.
396. *Ibid.*, § 12.
397. *Ibid.*, § 26.
398. *Ibid.*, § 29.
399. *Ibid.*, § 15.
400. *Pre-Raphaelitism*, § 1.
401. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, V, § 24.
402. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 496.
403. *Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, pp. 139-40.
404. May MORRIS, I, p. 292.
405. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, I, § 23.
406. *Modern Painters*, Pt. III, sec. I, ch. III, § 16.
407. *Val d'Arno*, VI, § 146.
408. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 38.
409. *Ibid.*, I, II, § 1.
410. *Ibid.*, § 17. It equally occurs to Ruskin to advocate a careful balance between beauty and usefulness, while completely dissociating the two concepts: see, for example, *The Political Economy of Art*, pp. 5-6.
411. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 16.
412. *The Political Economy of Art*, Preface, p. XX.
413. *Unto this Last*, Preface, p. 113.
414. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. VII, § 20.
415. *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, II, § 33.
416. *The Stones of Venice*, III, IV, § 29.
417. *Ibid.*, II, § 28.
418. *Ibid.*, I, II, § 17.
419. *Modern Painters*, Pt. IV, ch. XVI, § 19.
420. May MORRIS, I, p. 295.
421. *Commonweal*, 15 May 1886, p. 50/II; Cf. C.W., XIX, p. XXXVI.
422. *The Present Outlook in Politics*, 1887, LE MIRE, p. 209.
423. "A Talk with William Morris on Socialism", *The Daily News*, 8 January 1885, p. 5/VI.
424. E. R. PEASE: *The History of the Fabian Society*, p. 27.
425. *Ibid.*, Appendix I, p. 278.
426. *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 633.
427. *Commonweal*, 20 April 1889, p. 125/II.
428. Dona TORR: *Tom Mann and His Times*, pp. 80-3.
429. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 13-16.
430. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 83, § 1.
431. *Unto this Last*, p. 187.
432. Cf. E. M. Forster's comment; "For it was the voice of one who had never been dirty or hungry, and had not guessed successfully what dirt and hunger are" (*Howards End*, Penguin Books, p. 48).
433. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 15.
434. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 39.
435. Cf.: "But note further; there is another relation between us than of idler and labourer; the much more direct one of Master and Servant (*Fors Clavigera*, Letter

- 28, § 10).
436. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 84, § 14.
437. *The End and the Means*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 422.
438. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 657.
439. *Commonweal*, 15 May 1886, p. 50/II.
440. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 15, § 1.
441. *Unto this Last*, p. 163.
442. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
443. *Ibid.*
444. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
445. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.
446. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 5, § 18.
447. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 87.
448. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
449. *Unto this Last*, p. 149.
450. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 14.
451. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, § 143.
452. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 29, § 3.
453. *Ibid.*, Letter 83, § 1.
454. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 3.
455. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
456. *The Stones of Venice*, II, VI, § 21.
457. *Ibid.*, § 15.
458. *Ibid.*, I, I, § 4 and 12.
459. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 15.
460. *Ibid.*, III, II, § 45.
461. *Ibid.*, II, VI, § 15.
462. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, § 133.
463. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 98.
464. *The Crown of Wild Olive*, § 140.
465. *Time and Tide*, § 138.
466. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 84, § 14.
467. *The Eagle's Nest*, V, § 77.
468. *The Political Economy of Art*, p. 80.
469. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
470. *The Stones of Venice*, I, Appendix 12.
471. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 67, § 16.
472. *Munera Pulveris*, § 130.
473. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, VII, § 1 and 2.
474. *The Stones of Venice*, III, IV, § 3.
475. *Ibid.*, Appendix 7.
476. *Munera Pulveris*, § 121.
477. *Ibid.*, § 26.
478. *Unto this Last*, p. 135.
479. *The Political Economy of Art*, pp. 10, 11.
480. *Unto this Last*, pp. 118-122.
481. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
482. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 515.
483. *Works*, XXXVI, p. 239; XXVII, p. 167.
484. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 7, § 2. On 26 March 1886, he wrote to Sydney Cockerell, whose close links with Morris are well known: "Of course I am a Socialist – of the most stern sort – but I am also a Tory of the sternest sort" (*Cockerell Papers* B.M. Add. Mss. 52 751; cf. V. MEYNELL: *Friends of a Life-Time*, p. 26).
485. A serious and interesting study of the Guild of St. George can be found in W. H.

- G. ARMYTAGE's: *Heavens Below*, pp. 289-304.
486. *Modern Painters*, Pt. VIII, ch. I, § 6.
  487. *The Stones of Venice*, III, II, § 39.
  488. *Unto this Last*, p. 152.
  489. *The Political Economy of Art*, pp. 61-2.
  490. *Unto this Last*, p. 147.
  491. *Ibid.*, p. 136 n.
  492. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
  493. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
  494. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
  495. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7, n. 1.
  496. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 7, § 13.
  497. A. L. MORTON: *The Matter of Britain*, p. 146.
  498. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 22, § 14.
  499. *Ibid.*, Letter 7, § 6-11.
  500. *Works*, XXXIV, p. 533.
  501. To an unidentified correspondent, 4 September 1882, May MORRIS, II, p. 584.
  502. MACKAIL, I, p. 220.
  503. *The Art of England*, VI, § 187.
  504. May MORRIS, II, p. XXXII
  505. *Commonweal*, 15 May 1886, p. 50/II; C.W., XIX, p. XXXVI.
  506. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 102.
  507. "Looking Backward", *Commonweal*, 22 June 1889, p. 194/I; May MORRIS, II, p. 503.
  508. *How Shall We Live Then?* 1889, pp. 9-10.
  509. "Honesty is the Best Policy, or The Inconvenience of Stealing – a Dialogue", *Commonweal*, 5 November 1887, p. 357/II.
  510. *Cockerell Papers*, B.M. Add. Mss. 52 751, a letter from Ruskin to S. Cockerell, 26 March 1886; cf. V. MEYNELL: *Friends of a Life-Time*, p. 26.
  511. May MORRIS, I, p. 292.
  512. Cf. THOMPSON, p. 312.
  513. *The Stones of Venice*, III, II, § 13, n. 1.
  514. To Robert Thompson, 24 July 1884, *Letters*, p. 204.
  515. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 657.
  516. Cf. Holbrook JACKSON: *Dreamers of Dreams*, p. 152.

## Part II Chapter III

1. Cf. Lenin's judgment: "Marx was the genius who continued and consummated the three main ideological currents of the nineteenth century, as represented by the three most advanced countries of mankind: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines in general" (*Works*, vol. XXI, p. 50).
2. *Commonweal*, 12 June 1886, p. 88/II.
3. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 68.
4. E. Belfort BAX: *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid-and-Late Victorian*, p. 162.
5. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 157-8.
6. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 95.
7. P. 5; *Anti-Dühring*, p. 24.
8. *Conspiration pour l'égalité dite de Babeuf*, I, p. 186.



9. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 214-5, n.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 165 and n.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-5.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 213, n.
20. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 105.
21. SAINT-SIMON: *Textes Choisis*, éd. Dautry, pp. 94 and 99. Rather than refer the reader to the 47 volumes of the *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin* (1865-78), I thought it preferable, in view of the abundant repetitions in Saint-Simon's writings, to make use of this excellent collection which includes the essential texts, as well as the edition of selected works published by G. Gurvitch under the title *La Physiologie sociale*.
22. He would have appreciated much less still Saint-Simon's opinions upon work: "Man is naturally lazy; a man who works is only driven to overcome his laziness by the need to supply his wants or by the desire to procure pleasures for himself" (Ed. G. Gurvitch, p. 71).
23. *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 15; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 212-3.
24. This allusion to the fight in the International against Bakunin and his supporters ties up with Morris's own preoccupations after his tussles with the anarchists in the Socialist League.
25. *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 76-7.
26. Although our conclusions are not identical, I am indebted to some extent to the work of investigation carried out by Gustav Fritzsche in his very debatable but serious book, *William Morris' Sozialismus und anarchistischer Kommunismus* (1927).
27. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, *Nonesuch*, p. 656.
28. Cf. May MORRIS, II, p. 77.
29. R. PEASE: *History of the Fabian Society*, Appendix I, p. 274.
30. Vol. XXV, pp. 217-37, 373-82, 513-30.
31. Far from being hostile to Socialism, Stuart Mill had written in *The Principles of Political Economy*: "If the choice were to be made between Communism with all its chances, and the present state of society with all its sufferings and injustices, . . . if this or Communism were the alternative, all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism would be but as dust in the balance. . . . We are too ignorant, either of what individual agency in its best form or Socialism in its best form can accomplish, to be qualified to decide which of the two will be the ultimate form of human society" (Bk. II, ch. I, sec. 3). Now Morris had perhaps read the *Principles*, since in 1883 he wrote, in *Art under Plutocracy*, "you must agree with John Stuart Mill in his doubt whether all the machinery of modern times has lightened the daily work of one labourer" (JACKSON, p. 145), and he repeated, the following year, in *Art and Socialism*, "In the opinion of John Stuart Mill, it was doubtful if all the mechanical inventions of modern times had done anything to lighten the toil of labour" (*Nonesuch*, p. 637). It is, in fact, in the *Principles* that we read: "It is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being" (Bk. IV, ch. VI, sec. 2). It is perhaps true that Morris had only picked up this quotation in *Capital*, where it is the subject of critical comment by Marx (p. 405).
32. "A passage in Considérant's 'Destinée Sociale' was often quoted with glee and emphasis – where the author talks of certain modern habits and adjuncts of life

that should be modified or dismissed, and speaks of 'the ferocious, the inevitable, the untameable piano' " (C.W., XII, pp. IX-X).

33. Since successive editions of Fourier are variably available for different works, and since repetitions are abundant from one book to another, I considered it advisable to restrict references to three sources. The first is the excellent *Fourier* by F. Armand and R. Maublanc (1937); it has a remarkable introduction and provides an anthology of selected texts which brings out all aspects of his ideology. This edition, which has become rare, has been re-issued in an abridged form by F. Armand in his *Textes Choisis* (1953), and, as it is readily available, I refer to it whenever possible. My third source will be *La Destinée sociale*, by V. Considérant, when it gives us precise formulations which dispense with long quotations.
34. *Destinée sociale*, I, p. 48.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
36. Ed. Armand, p. 70.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 129, n. 1.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
43. *Destinée sociale*, I, p. 75.
44. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, II, pp. 22-3.
45. Ed. Armand, pp. 83-4.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
47. *Destinée sociale*, II, pp. 243-7.
48. *Ibid.*, I, p. 290.
49. Ed. Armand, p. 151.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.
51. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, II, p. 227.
52. *Destinée sociale*, II, p. 29.
53. See below, p. 499.
54. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 61.
55. Ed. Armand, pp. 135-7.
56. *Destinée sociale*, I, p. 551.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 538.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
59. Ed. Armand, p. 142.
60. MACKAIL, II, pp. 243-4.
61. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 215.
62. *Destinée sociale*, I, p. 70.
63. *Ibid.* p. 302.
64. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 215.
65. *Destinée sociale*, I, pp. 350-1.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
67. See below, Part III, chapter I.
68. Ed. Armand, p. 135.
69. *Destinée sociale*, II, pp. XVII-XVIII.
70. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 105.
71. *Commonweal*, 25 January 1890, p. 29/I.
72. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 85.
73. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 215.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 305-6.
75. Ed. Armand, p. 145.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
78. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, II, p. 154.
79. *Destinée sociale*, II, p. 50.
80. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, I, p. 234, n. 1.
81. Ed. Armand, p. 57.
82. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, I, p. 52.
83. *Ibid.*, II, p. 54.
84. *Ibid.*, I, p. 248.
85. Ed. Armand, p. 140.
86. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, II, p. 156.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1.
88. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 215. In fact, Fourier wrote: "the love of dirt is a necessary incentive for enrolling children into the Little Hordes, for helping them to endure happily the disgust attaching to filthy work, and to create for themselves, in the *career of muckiness*, a vast field of industrial glory and unitary philanthropy" (Ed. Armand-Maublanc, II, pp. 233-4).
89. Ed. Armand, pp. 62-3.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.
91. *Destinée sociale*, II, p. 134.
92. Ed. Armand, p. 141.
93. *Destinée sociale*, II, p. 203.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
95. Ed. GUYOT: *L'Idée socialiste chez William Morris*, p. 56.
96. Ed. Armand, p. 141.
97. Ed. Armand-Maublanc, II, pp. 168-9.
98. Note, in passing, that this desire does not appear at all in the work of Considérant.
99. May MORRIS, I, p. 294.
100. Walthamstow Mss, J. 193.
101. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 102.
102. *Organisation du travail*, p. 4.
103. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
105. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 212-3.
108. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 227.
109. *Organisation du travail*, p. 166.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
111. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 226.
112. *Organisation du travail*, p. 118.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
114. MACKAIL, II, p. 97. According to Thompson (p. 307), Morris read Owen's writings from 1882, but no source is quoted to justify the assertion. What is curious is that Morris does not mention Owen in his lectures or articles before 1885.
115. Cf. R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris: the Man and the Myth*, p. 77. George Wardle is perhaps referring to this work when he mentions, in a letter to S. Cockerell on 24 August 1898, a biography of Owen among Morris's reading (May MORRIS, II, p. 606).
116. Walthamstow Mss, J. 193; a letter from May Morris to Scheu, 25 August 1885, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam (*Scheu Correspondence*).
117. *Commercial War*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, p. 311.
118. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 101.
119. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 208 and 278.
120. *Preface to the Nature of Gothic*, 1892, May MORRIS, I, p. 294.



121. *The Hopes of Civilization*, *ibid.*
122. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 209.
123. *Ibid.*
124. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 2 June 1888, p. 169/I; May MORRIS, II, p. 300.
125. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 210.
126. Cf. THOMPSON, pp. 347 and 356; May MORRIS, II, pp. 171 and 186.
127. "Communism and Anarchism", Correspondence, *Commonweal*, 17 August 1889, p. 261/I.
128. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 210.
129. "Why I am a Communist", *Liberty*, February 1894, p. 13/I.
130. "Answers to Previous Inquiries", *Commonweal*, September 1885 (Supplement), p. 87/II.
131. *The Political Outlook*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 279.
132. *Commercial War*, 1885, *ibid.*, p. 311.
133. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 178, n. 1.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
135. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 102-3.
136. "Review", *Commonweal*, 10 July 1886, p. 117/II.
137. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 217.
138. MARX and ENGELS: *On Britain*, pp. 491-2.
139. On this subject, one cannot too strongly recommend the reading of Elwood P. LAWRENCE's study, *Henry George in the British Isles*.
140. *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 210, 234, 258, 287, 288.
141. *Ibid.*, pp. 289 and 308.
142. H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp. 281-2; see also pp. 290-3.
143. MARX and ENGELS: *Letters to Americans*, pp. 127-9.
144. MARX and ENGELS: *On Britain*, p. 517.
145. This preface is not included in the English edition of the book.
146. To Jenny Morris, 13 November 1882, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 339.
147. To C. E. Maurice, 22 June 1883, *Letters*, p. 174.
148. "Henry George", *Justice*, 5 April 1884, p. 4/I-II.
149. "Notes" *Commonweal*, 15 October 1887, p. 329/I.
150. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 12 November 1887, p. 361/II.
151. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 8 June 1889, p. 177/II.
152. THOMPSON, pp. 852 and 856.
153. *Progress and Poverty*, p. 315.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
155. *Ibid.*, pp. 330-1.
156. *Ibid.*, pp. 344-5.
157. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
159. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
160. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
161. *Ibid.*, pp. 398-9.
162. See below: Part III, chapter V.
163. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 656.
164. A detailed bibliography is to be found in the above-mentioned study of Morris by Gustav Fritzsche (pp. 127-8).
165. To John Carruthers, 25 March 1886, *Letters*, p. 251.
166. See Kropotkin's letters to Morris, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 345.
167. Letter to J. L. Mahon, 25 March 1886 (R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris: the Man and the Myth*, p. 60).
168. To Bruce Glasier, 1st December 1886, *Letters*, p. 263.
169. Cf. G. WOODCOCK: *Anarchism*, p. 197.

170. Here is an extract from a letter from Morris to Joynes, written on 3 February 1885, when the newly-founded League was becoming organised. It seems to me to show very clearly his ideological position and his behaviour as a man: "I have made Kitz's acquaintance lately: like most of our East-Enders he is certainly somewhat tinged with anarchism or perhaps one may say destructivism: but I liked him very much. I called on the poor chap at the place where he lived, and it fairly gave me the horrors to see how wretchedly off he was; so it isn't much to wonder at that he takes the line he does" (B.M. Add. Mss. 45 345).
171. C.W., XX, p. XXI.
172. May MORRIS, II, p. XVI.
173. *Paroles d'un révolté*, p. 314.
174. H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp. 262-4.
175. *Paroles d'un révolté*, pp. 2-3.
176. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
177. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
178. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. 372.
179. *Paroles d'un révolté*, pp. 241 and 244.
180. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 464-5.
181. The chronology of these articles is to be found in *Mutual Aid*, p. 10.
182. *Mutual Aid*, p. 147.
183. *Paroles d'un révolté*, pp. 204-5.
184. *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 38.
185. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
186. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
187. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-2.
188. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
189. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-9.
190. *Ibid.*, pp. 97 and 107.
191. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
192. *Ibid.*, pp. 85 and 190.
193. This trait of Kropotkin's is brought out by Hyndman: "At first I tried to argue with him about his Anarchist opinions. . . I found this was quite hopeless. You could pin him to nothing, and his capacity for genial misrepresentation of Social-Democratic thought and principle and argument transcended belief" (*op. cit.*, p. 262).
194. *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 24.
195. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 359-62; *Paroles d'un révolté*, p. 121.
196. *Paroles d'un révolté*, pp. 138-9.
197. *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 28.
198. Bruce GLASIER, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

## Part II, Chapter IV

1. "When he undertook to write his own romance of the future – "News from Nowhere" – he produced perhaps the most thoroughly and deeply anarchist conception of the future society that has ever been written" ("In Memory of William Morris", *Freedom*, November 1896, p. 109/II).
2. See, in particular, Guy A. ALDRED: *Pioneers of Anti-Parliamentarianism*, pp. 11-24.
3. May MORRIS, II, p. XVIII. In truth, Morris said to Sydney Webb, on 13 October 1895, after a lecture by the latter at Kelmscott House: "The world is going your way at present, Webb, but it is not the right way in the end" (R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris, the Man and the Myth*, p. 108). And Page Arnot had this

remark recounted to him by Webb himself. It is clear that Bernard Shaw was not lacking in nerve!

4. *The Daily Chronicle*, 6 October 1896, p. 9/IV; *The Clarion*, 10 October 1896, p. 325/III.
5. Mrs. TOWNSHEND: "William Morris and the Communist Ideal", *Fabian Tract* n° 167 (1912), p. 17.
6. MACKAIL, II, p. 292. Morris's own italics.
7. H. V. WILES (*William Morris of Walthamstow*, p. 97) quotes passages from a speech of Attlee's, on 21 October 1950: "I think he would rejoice at the great social changes, the greater fellowship, and the sweeping away of injustices. He would see that we are striving at something. . ."
8. "Steeped in the lore of the Viking peoples, and himself something of a Viking. . . Morris recreates in the romances the corporate life which has been the strength down the centuries of the Nordic races. Had he been alive today, Morris would have seen in the Fascist Corporations the modern equivalent of the Guilds whose working he describes so lovingly" (Adam NEIL: "William Morris, Pioneer of Fascism. The Impossibility of Socialism", *Fascist Weekly*, 30 March 1934, p. 7/I-II).
9. W. R. LETHABY and Robert STEELE: *Quarterly Review*, October 1899, p. 489.
10. Esther MEYNELL: *Portrait of William Morris*, p. 163.
11. Nikolaus PEVSNER: *Pioneers of Modern Design*, p. 24.
12. M. GRENNAN: *William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary*, pp. 57 and 154.
13. A. CLUTTON-BROCK: *William Morris, his Work and Influence*, p. 225.
14. Max NORDAU: *Dégénérescence*, I, pp. 176-7. (Quotation translated from French text, not from original German.)
15. H. PELLING: *Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 33.
16. V. DUPONT: *L'Utopie et le roman utopique dans la littérature anglaise*, p. 505.
17. A. COMPTON-RICKETT: *William Morris: A Study in Personality*, pp. 201 and 229.
18. ". . . He was in no mood for half-measures: his programme was the marxist one, its motive was the class-war, its culmination was to be a violent revolution" (*The Last Romantics*, p. 102).
19. R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris: A Vindication*.
20. MACKAIL, I, p. 80.
21. *Ibid.*, II, p. 89.
22. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 656; MACKAIL, II, p. 80.
23. MACKAIL, I, p. 79.
24. *Ibid.*, II, p. 94.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 164; cf. R. FURNEAUX-JORDAN: *The Medieval Vision of William Morris*, p. 22.
26. *The Observer*, 6 November 1949, p. 7/VI. This article of Shaw's drew a letter of protest to the *Observer* from Sydney Cockerell, whose political competence was certainly open to question (*ibid.*, 20 November 1949, p. 5/1).
27. Cf. E. R. PEASE: *History of the Fabian Society*, Appendix III, p. 287. We learn from the same source that her husband, H. Halliday Sparling, occupied the same position from 1892 to 1894.
28. THOMPSON, pp. 888-9.
29. William GALLACHER, *Last Memoirs*, pp. 81, 114-5.
30. C. Desmond GREAVES: *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, p. 96.
31. *Lenin on Britain*, p. 93.
32. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 32.



36. 18 October 1890, p. 81/I-II-III.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
38. THOMPSON, p. 891.
39. GLASIER, *ibid.*, p. 143.
40. This word is in italics in the text.
41. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. VI.
42. THOMPSON, p. 891.
43. J. W. Mackail to S. Cockerell, 10 July 1940, B.M. Add. Mss. 52 734 (100).
44. *Op. cit.*, p. 193.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-8.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 322.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-6.
53. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 659.
54. E. P. Thompson had already denounced the imposture of Lloyd Eric Grey in an article published in *Arena*, April-May 1951, under the title: "The Murder of William Morris".
55. See, for example, Philip HENDERSON: *William Morris, his Life, Work and Friends*, 1967, *passim*.
56. W. Scawen BLUNT: *My Diaries*, p. 24.
57. May MORRIS, II, p. XXIII. "I, not being a learned person", wrote Morris in *The Woodcuts of Gothic Books*, 1892, May MORRIS, I, p. 323.
58. G. B. SHAW: "Morris as Actor and Dramatist", *Saturday Review*, 10 October 1896, p. 386/I.
59. LE MIRE, p. 151 of original typewritten edition.
60. Cf. H. PELLING: *The Origins of the Labour Party*, p. 14.
61. Cf. *Correspondence F. Engels - Paul and Laura Lafargue*, II, pp. 27 and 163; Ch. TSUZUKI: *The Life of Eleanor Marx*, pp. 152-3.
62. E. R. PEASE: *History of the Fabian Society*, pp. 23-5.
63. May MORRIS, II, p. XII.
64. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 656. On 24 August 1898, G. Wardle wrote to S. Cockerell: "I do not think he had read any distinctively socialist book before he joined Hyndman. He would have been sure to speak of it. . ." (May MORRIS, II, p. 603).
65. C.W., XXII, p. XX.
66. C.W., XIX, p. XVI.
67. May MORRIS, II, p. 74, n.
68. P. HENDERSON: *William Morris, his Life, Work and Friends*, p. 259.
69. MACKAIL, II, p. 97.
70. I point out for the record (for, as I have said, I doubt whether responsibility for it can be attributed to Morris) that the list "Books for Socialists" published in *Commonweal* on 12 June 1886, mentions German and French editions of *Capital*.
71. E. R. PEASE, *ibid.*, pp. 24-5; May MORRIS, II, p. XI.
72. *Commonweal*, 20 November 1886, p. 272/III.
73. Letter from G. Wardle to S. Cockerell, 24 August 1898; May MORRIS, II, p. 606.
74. H. M. HYNDMAN and W. MORRIS: *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism*, p. 42.
75. THOMPSON, p. 850. Among the titles of books to read in English, the "Books for Socialists" list includes *The Communist Manifesto of 1847*.

76. C.W., XIX, p. XXV.
77. *Commonweal*, 18 June 1887, p. 197/II.
78. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 190, 231 and 278.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 212-4.
80. F. Engels to F. K. Wischnewetzky, 3 December 1887, MEW, vol. 36, p. 727. On the same date, Engels gave the same information to Sorge (*Correspondance Engels-Marx et divers*, publiée par F.A. Sorge, trad. Bracke, éd. Costes, II, p. 123).
81. Engels to F. K. Wischnewetzky, 22 February 1888, MEW, vol. 37, p. 27.
82. H. A. BARKER: "The Condition of the Working Classes", *Commonweal*, 3 December 1887, p. 388/I-II.
83. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 219 and 232.
84. *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, p. 300.
85. *Justice*, 8 November 1884, p. 3/I.
86. See below, Part III, Chapter I.
87. C.W., XIV, p. XXV.
88. To the Editor, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 February 1886, *Letters*, p. 246.
89. 18 October 1890, p. 81/I.
90. To Jane Alice Morris, 1883, *Letters*, p. 170.
91. To Andreas Scheu, 20 August 1884, *ibid.*, p. 212.
92. "Mr. E. Magnusson, of whom I learned to read the language of the North, and with whom I studied most of the works of that literature" (To Andreas Scheu, 5 September 1883, *ibid.*, p. 186).
93. "... We all talk nothing but Icelandic together" (To Mrs. Coronio, 11 February 1873, *ibid.*, p. 54).
94. See his letters to A. J. Wyatt of 28 August 1892 and 8 October 1893, *ibid.*, pp. 351, 353, 355; cf. May MORRIS, I, p. 492.
95. To the Editor, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *ibid.*
96. May MORRIS, II, p. XXIII.
97. Letter to Mrs. Morris, 31 March 1881, May MORRIS, II, p. 583.
98. *Engels' Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, pp. 104-5.
99. I.I.S.G., Amsterdam, Scheu Correspondence.
100. May MORRIS, II, p. IX.
101. To Mrs. W. Morris, 18 March 1884. *Letters*, p. 195. The account of this march to Highgate Cemetery is to be found in a letter from Eleanor Marx to Laura Lafargue, dated 17 March 1884. The beginning of this letter is in the E. Bottigelli Collection in Paris; the last sheet is in the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (G. 299).
102. *Architecture and History*, C.W., XXII, p. 311; May MORRIS, I, p. 139.
103. *The Revival of Handicraft*, 1888, JACKSON, pp. 222-3.
104. "Fabian Essays on Socialism", *Commonweal*, 25 January 1890, p. 28/II.
105. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 107.
106. "I have cancelled the footnote about Marx and the 'prolix and pedantic' for the reprint of the articles on Socialism" (Annie Besant to W. Morris, 9 March 1886, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 345).
107. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 230-67.
108. "Fabiana", *To-day*, XI, April 1889, p. 120.
109. *How Shall We Live Then?* 1889, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam, pp. 7-8, 10.
110. May MORRIS, II, pp. 75-6.
111. Walthamstow Mss, J. 151.
112. R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris: A Vindication*, p. 7.
113. *The Journals of Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson*, I, pp. 384-5. See also pp. 200 and 202.
114. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, September 1883, *Letters*, p. 181.
115. *Letters*, p. 212.

116. B.M. Add. Mss. 45 335.
117. It is a curious and perhaps significant fact that May Morris (II, p. 173) quotes only the first entry and Mackail (II, p. 177) only the second; neither of them quotes the third!
118. Frank FAIRMAN: *The Principles of Socialism made Plain*, p. II.
119. The most serious study of Hyndman, despite the debatable character of its political analyses, is that of Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism*. See also E. P. Thompson's book, which abounds in interesting details, and Hyndman's own memoirs, *The Record of an Adventurous Life and Further Reminiscences*. Lenin's judgment of Hyndman is included in the collection *Lenin on Britain*.
120. Engels to Sorge, 7 December 1889, *Letters to Americans*, p. 220.
121. In particular, I found in the Marx-Engels Archives of the I.I.S.G. in Amsterdam (L. 2476) a letter from Hyndman to Engels, dated 30 October 1884, in which he asks him to write for *Justice* an article upon the recent electoral victory of the German social democratic party. Either Engels never replied or the terms of his reply were such that Hyndman preferred to suppress it, as he did Marx's letter of 2 July 1881.
122. See the article by Emile Bottigelli: "La Rupture Marx-Hyndman" in the *Annali dell' Instituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, 1960, pp. 621-9, and my commentary on this article, printed under the same title, in *La Pensée*, n° 101, January-February 1962, pp. 133-5. See also H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp. 251-2, and E. Belfort BAX: *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid-and-Late Victorian*, pp. 52-3.
123. This letter is published after that of Marx in the above-mentioned article by E. Bottigelli.
124. MARX and ENGELS: *Letters to Americans*, p. 130.
125. H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, pp. 271, 272, 288.
126. H. M. HYNDMAN: "William Morris", *Justice*, 10 October 1896, p. 4/II. In 1911, he referred to having renewed the contact in January 1882 (*The Record*, p. 349).
127. H. M. HYNDMAN: *ibid.*, pp. 351, 356-7.
128. May MORRIS, II, p. XIII.
129. *Ibid.*, p. 602.
130. To C. E. Maurice, 1st July 1883, *Letters*, p. 176.
131. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, August 1883, *ibid.*, p. 181.
132. To Jane Alice Morris, 28 August 1883, *ibid.*, p. 180.
133. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 656.
134. *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 357.
135. May Morris writes: "My father never rejoined the Social Democratic Federation, nor had he any intention of doing so, though friendly relations were resumed with Mr. Hyndman, and he wrote a few articles occasionally for *Justice* when pressed to do so" (C.W., XIX, p. XXIV).
136. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 185.
137. *Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 404.
138. May MORRIS, II, p. 178.
139. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.
140. To Jane Alice Morris, 1883, *Letters*, p. 170.
141. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
142. Andreas SCHEU: *Umsturzkeime*, Part III, ch. VI; S. BÜNGER: *Friedrich Engels und die britische sozialistische Bewegung*, p. 49.
143. Eleanor Marx to Laura Lafargue, 17 March 1884. E. Bottigelli Collection, Paris.
144. *Commonweal*, March 1885, p. 16/1.
145. Archives of the Socialist League, 123, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam. Cf. H. COLLINS and



- Chimen ABRAMSKY: *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, p. 301.
146. Cf. May MORRIS, II, p. 186; THOMPSON, p. 318.
  147. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 196-7.
  148. 24 February 1885, Correspondence of the Socialist League, I.I. S.G., Amsterdam.
  149. To date, the best documentation of the Aveling couple is to be found in another book by Ch. TSUZUKI: *The Life of Eleanor Marx*.
  150. *Commonweal*, February 1885, p. 5/II.
  151. B.M. Add. Mss. 46 345.
  152. "... they are well worth attending on all grounds" (To J. W. Browne, 10 March 1885, Hammersmith Central Reference Department, SSR 22). See Appendix II, p. 586.
  153. In the same issue (p. 23/I) is also a paragraph with his initials commemorating the anniversary of the death of Marx, "our greatest teacher". In the issue of August 1885, Aveling inserted another paragraph announcing the publication in Germany of Book II of *Capital* (p. 72/I).
  154. Cf. THOMPSON, pp. 896-7.
  155. Cf. Brian SIMON: *Education and the Labour Movement*, p. 31.
  156. MARX and ENGELS: *Letters to Americans*, p. 131.
  157. E. B. BAX: *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid-and-Late Victorian*, p. 45.
  158. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-7.
  159. I.I.S.G., Amsterdam. Marx-Engels Archives, L 162-6.
  160. Eleanor Marx to Laura Lafargue, 23 April 1886, E. Bottigelli Collection, Paris.
  161. "I was afraid to say all I thought to him lest he should blab," Morris wrote to Andreas Scheu, 9 July 1884, *Letters*, p. 202.
  162. Engels to Bernstein, 29 December 1884, *Labour Monthly*, October 1933, p. 649.
  163. Engels to Sorge, 29 April 1886 (*Correspondance Engels-Marx et divers*, II, p. 38).
  164. F. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 9 August 1887 (*Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, II, p. 57).
  165. To Andreas Scheu, 4 January 1885, *Letters*, p. 299; E. B. BAX, *ibid.*, p. 81.
  166. May MORRIS, II, pp. 173-4.
  167. E. B. BAX *ibid.*, pp. 119-20.
  168. *The Early Literature of the North*, 1887, p. 450.
  169. *The Tables Turned; or Nupkins Awakened*, May MORRIS, II, p. 546.
  170. To Joynes, 4 August 1891, May MORRIS, II, p. 600.
  171. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 656.
  172. May MORRIS, II, p. 174.
  173. Cf. R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris, the Man and the Myth*, p. 63; Engels to Sorge, 4 June 1887 (*Correspondance Engels-Marx et divers*, II, p. 98).
  174. To J. L. Mahon, 14 October 1887; to John Glasse, 23 September 1887 (R. P. ARNOT, *ibid.*, pp. 74 and 86).
  175. For example: "I will consult with him next Wednesday" (To Bruce Glasier, 24 April 1886, *Letters*, p. 253).
  176. THOMPSON, p. 605.
  177. E. B. BAX: "Africa", *Commonweal*, 28 July 1888, p. 236/II.
  178. "Notes on News". *ibid.*, p. 233/II.
  179. *The Revival of Handicraft*, 1888, JACKSON, pp. 223-4.
  180. *The Society of the Future*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 457.
  181. *The Arts and Crafts of To-day*, 1889, JACKSON, p. 241.
  182. See below, Part III, chapter X.
  183. Cf.: "Bax, à la recherche, by means of half-digested Hegelian dialectic, of extreme and paradoxical propositions. . ." (F. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 28 April 1886, Bottigelli Collection, Paris); "Bax. . . has concocted his own form of socialism which he takes for true marxist theory, and so does a great deal of harm" (F. Engels to Bebel, 18 August 1886, MEW, vol. 36, p. 510).

184. E. B. BAX: *Reminiscences*. . ., pp. 46-7.
185. H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 252.
186. Ed. AVELING: "Frederick Engels at Home", *The Labour Prophet*, September 1895, p. 141/II.
187. Ed. BERNSTEIN: *My Years of Exile*, p. 206. Note the difference of tone between the two accounts. Bernstein, who never had any bone to pick with Morris, speaks, not of "good-humoured toleration" but of "respect".
188. G. Wardle to S. Cockerell, 24 August 1898, May MORRIS, II, p. 606. May Morris is content with publishing the letter in an appendix, but takes no account in her own text of the fact revealed by Wardle.
189. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 16 February 1884, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 179.
190. *Engels' Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, pp. 104-6 (12 and 24 March 1884).
191. Eleanor Marx to Laura Lafargue, 17 March 1884, Bottigelli Collection, Paris.
192. *To-day*, May 1884, p. 388.
193. Engels to K. Kautsky, 22 June 1884, *Engels' Briefwechsel*. . ., p. 124.
194. 19 July 1884, *ibid.*, p. 138.
195. 20 October 1884, *ibid.*, p. 151.
196. Tussy was the pet name of Eleanor Marx.
197. 8 November 1884, *ibid.*, p. 155.
198. *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 245.
199. To Andreas Scheu, 17 and 18 December 1884, *Letters*, p. 220.
200. Eleanor Marx to Laura Lafargue, 31 December 1884, Bottigelli Collection, Paris. See Appendix II, p. 584.
201. Engels to Bernstein, 29 December 1884, *Labour Monthly*, October 1933, p. 648.
202. To Andreas Scheu, 28 December 1884, *Letters*, p. 225.
203. THOMPSON, p. 414, n. 3.
204. In fact, he wrote to Scheu on 4 January 1885: "I intend, as far as I go, to turn it into a weekly if possible" (*Letters*, p. 229).
205. P. Lafargue to F. Engels, 5 February 1885, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 265.
206. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 1st January 1885, MEW, vol. 36. pp. 266-7.
207. Eleanor Marx to Laura Lafargue, 12 April 1885, Bottigelli Collection, Paris.
208. This was Marx's daughters' nickname for Engels.
209. In the Archives of the Socialist League, preserved at the I.I.S.G. in Amsterdam, is a letter in this vein sent by Eleanor to Wilhelm Liebknecht (G. 47).
210. Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Moscow, 662-417. The letter is not dated, but it is clear from the text that it was written in January 1885. See Appendix II, p. 586.
211. Eleanor Marx-Aveling to J. L. Mahon, 3 February 1885, Archives of the Socialist League, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam, 2 206.
212. *Ibid.*, 119.
213. *Commonweal*, March 1885, pp. 12/II, 13/I-II, 14/I.
214. THOMPSON, p. 436.
215. "New markets are getting scarcer every day, so much so that even the negroes of the Congo are now to be forced into the civilization attendant upon Manchester calicoes, Staffordshire pottery, and Birmingham hardware" (THOMPSON, p. 453, n. 2.)
216. *The Depression of Trade*, 1885, LE MIRE, p. 129.
217. *Commercial War*, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 333-4 (16); May MORRIS, II, p. 311, published a fragment of it.
218. *Notes on Propaganda*, *ibid.*, 46 345.
219. "To Our Readers" *Commonweal*, October 1885, p. 88/II.
220. F. ENGELS: "How Not to Translate Marx", *ibid.*, November 1885, pp. 97/I-II, 98/I..
221. S. BÜNGER: *Friedrich Engels und die britische sozialistische Bewegung*, p. 84; Thomp-

- son (p. 435) expresses the same opinion.
222. 4 November 1885, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 317.
  223. Engels to Sorge, 29 January 1886, *Correspondance Engels-Marx et divers*, II, pp. 23-4.
  224. Engels to P. Lafargue, 20 March 1886, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 347.
  225. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 28 April 1886, MEW, vol. 36., p. 474.
  226. Engels to Sorge, 29 April 1886, *ibid.*, II, p. 38.
  227. He exclaimed, in that vein: "I am a sentimentalist in all the affairs of life, and I am proud of the title" (*Address at the 12th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, 1889, May MORRIS, I, p. 147).
  228. Walter CRANE: *William Morris to Whistler*, pp. 4 and 9.
  229. H. Halliday SPARLING: *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris*, p. 40.
  230. R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris: the Man and the Myth*, p. 40.
  231. F. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 14 March 1882, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, III, p. 164).
  232. E. P. THOMPSON: *The Communism of William Morris*, pp. 5-6.
  233. Marx-Engels Archives, L. 5070-142, I.I.S.G., Amsterdam. This letter cannot have been written in 1885, because in March of that year there appeared the major article by Engels mentioned above. It would have been astonishing had Morris approached Engels again immediately afterwards, particularly without making any reference to the article. It seems more probable that it was written in the following year, at a time when personal contact was less frequent and Morris would not have had the opportunity of making the request verbally.
  234. *Commonweal*, 15 May 1886, p. 55/II.
  235. *Ibid.*, 13 November 1886, p. 262/I.
  236. F. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 23 May 1886, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 354.
  237. F. Engels to Bebel, 18 August 1886, MEW, vol. 36, p. 510.
  238. F. Engels to Laura Lafargue, 13 September 1886, *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 370.
  239. F. Engels to Laura Lafargue 21 May 1887, *ibid.*, II, p. 41; see also his letters of 26 April (p. 34) and 7 June (p. 44). Similarly see letters from Engels to Sorge of 23 April (*op. cit.*, p. 89), 4 May (p. 91) and 4 June (pp. 97-8).
  240. See below, Part III, chapter IV.
  241. "On account of Aveling, indeed, many people kept away from Engels' house" (Ed. BERNSTEIN: *My Years of Exile*, p. 202).
  242. After Morris's death, his son-in-law Sparling wrote to Aveling to try to recover this money, and Aveling replied, on 1st December 1896, that he was not in a position to pay. On 27 August 1895, he had made a similar reply to Morris (B.M. Add. Mss. 45 345 and 45 346).
  243. To Dr. John Glasse, 23 September 1887 (R. P. ARNOT: *William Morris, the Man and the Myth*, p. 86).
  244. To Laura Lafargue, 25 March 1889, Bottigelli Collection, Paris – These poems appeared in *Commonweal* on 13 April, 27 July, 21 September, 17 October, 28 December 1889 and 12 April 1890. In a letter to Engels in November 1889, Laura Lafargue refers with satisfaction to these appearances. (*Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, II, p. 347). See Appendix II, p. 587.
  245. P. Lafargue to F. Engels, 26 May and 2 June 1889, *ibid.*, II, pp. 263 and 269.
  246. See THOMPSON, p. 675; Engels to Laura Lafargue, 3 May 1892, (*Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, III, p. 170, and MEW, vol. 38, p. 332, n.).
  247. Engels to Aug. Momberger, 9 March 1894, MEW, vol. 39, p. 217.
  248. Engels to Sorge, 21 March 1894, *Correspondance Engels-Marx et divers*, II, p. 315.
  249. To the Rev. George Bainton, 2 April 1888, *Letters*, p. 282.
  250. *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 613.
  251. *Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 389; *Misery and the Way Out*, 1884,



- ibid.*, p. 160; *At a Picture Show*, 1884, *ibid.*, pp. 415-6; *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, 1885, THOMPSON, pp. 849-50; *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 182-90; *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, pp. 304-6; *The End and the Means*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, pp. 429-31; *Communism, i.e. Property*, 1892, *ibid.*, pp. 348-9; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 233-41.
252. *A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, p. 252.
253. See, among other texts: *Speech on Opening the Fourth Annual Loan Exhibition*, Whitechapel, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 167; *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, pp. 569-71 and 575; *The Depression of Trade*, 1885, LE MIRE, p. 119; *Socialism*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, pp. 195-6; *The End and the Means*, 1886, *ibid.*, pp. 425-8; *A Dream of John Ball*, 1886, Nonesuch, p. 254; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 272-3.
254. On this point, it is appropriate to add the following to the references given in the preceding note: *Architecture and History*, 1884, C.W., XXII, p. 313; *Misery and the Way Out*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 153; *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 638; *What Socialists Want*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 219; *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 183-4.
255. See *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 637; *The Depression of Trade*, 1885, LE MIRE, pp. 119-23; *Art and its Producers*, 1888, JACKSON, pp. 213-5; *The Arts and Crafts of To-Day*, 1889, *ibid.*, p. 237; *Address at the 12th Annual Meeting of the SPAB*, 1889, May MORRIS, I, p. 155; *News from Nowhere*, 1890, Nonesuch, pp. 87, 89, 90.
256. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 35.
257. I cite particularly: *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 613; *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, *ibid.*, p. 572; *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, pp. 303-16; *The End and the Means*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 429; *The Tables Turned. . .*, 1887, *ibid.*, pp. 529-30; *Monopoly. . .*, 1887, JACKSON, pp. 204-6; *London in a State of Siege*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, pp. 254-5; *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, pp. 71-3, 77, 104; *The Socialist Ideal*, 1891, JACKSON, p. 324; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 23.
258. It is relevant to remark, moreover, that in *The Origin of the Family* Engels, when discussing the succession of Western social structures, completely omitted this problem.
259. JACKSON, pp. 300-6.
260. I cite: *Art, Wealth and Riches*, 1883, *ibid.*, p. 123; *Letters*, p. 175; *Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, pp. 94-118; *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, 1885, THOMPSON, p. 853; *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 89-96, etc. . .
261. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 30.
262. Cf. *Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, pp. 138-9.
263. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 26.
264. *Capital*, p. 837.
265. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 109.
266. I cite, among others: *Letters*, pp. 176, 190-206; *Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, p. 151; *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 573; *Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 117; *Commercial War*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, p. 311; *The Depression of Trade*, 1885, LE MIRE, p. 129; *Equality*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 203.
267. *Capital*, p. 837. The same formulation is used in *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 266-7.
268. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 107.
269. R. RUYER: *L'Utopie et les utopies*, pp. 63-6.
270. G. FRITZSCHE: *William Morris' Sozialismus und anarchistischer Kommunismus*, p. 54.
271. K. MARX: *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 13.
272. F. ENGELS: *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 73.

273. "Facing the Worst of it", *Commonweal*, 19 February 1887, p. 60/I.
274. *A Factory as it Might Be*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 646.
275. *Communism*, 1893 *ibid.*, p. 661.
276. I cite particularly: *Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 403-4; *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 586; *Letters*, p. 207; *Commercial War*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, p. 311; *The End and the Means*, 1886, *ibid.*, p. 422; "Looking Backward", 1889, May MORRIS, II, p. 504; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 19; *The Promise of May*, 1896, May MORRIS, II, p. 362.
277. MARX and ENGELS: *The German Ideology*, p. 646.
278. *The Society of the Future*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 456.
279. See below, pp. 490-1.
280. F. ENGELS: *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, p. 82.
281. *The Gothic Revival*, I, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 64. Two pages further on, Morris repeats: "that liberty or knowledge of necessity". Le Mire accompanies this passage with the appallingly revealing note: "No source has been found for this paraphrase, though it approximates roughly to the utilitarian position" (p. 344 of the original typewritten edition).
282. *Equality*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 202.
283. *Ibid.*
284. K. MARX: *Capital*, p. 198.
285. *Ibid.*
286. K. MARX: *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 31.
287. K. MARX: *Capital*, p. 462.
288. *Ibid.*, pp. 396-9.
289. *Ibid.*, p. 534.
290. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
291. *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 35.

### Part III, Chapter I

1. See above, pp. 68-73.
2. *Letters*, p. 236.
3. 13 May, 1885, *ibid.*
4. "I am in low spirits about the prospects of our 'party'." (*ibid.*).
5. In 1890, in his last contribution to *Commonweal*, Morris, referring to the first years of struggle, well described this initial uncertainty: "When we first began to work together, there was little said about anything save the great ideals of Socialism; and so far off did we seem from the realisation of these, that we could hardly think of any means for their realisation, save great dramatic events which would make our lives tragic indeed, but would take us out of the sordidness of the so-called 'peace' of civilisation. With the great extension of Socialism, this also is changed" ("Where Are We Now?", *Commonweal*, 15 November 1890, p. 361/II; May MORRIS, II, p. 515).
6. "But as it is, the best thing one can wish for this country at least is, meseems, some great and tragical circumstances, so that if they cannot have pleasant life... they may at least have a history and something to think of..." (To Mrs. Alfred Baldwin, 26 March 1874, *Letters*, p. 62).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
8. "...I fear that I must say that if it does not come about, it will be owing to some turn of events which we cannot at present foresee..." (*The Lesser Arts*, Nonesuch, p. 501).
9. *The Lesser Arts of Life*, MACMILLAN, p. 229.

10. See above, pp. 193-5.
11. Cf. the summary Morris made for himself of these Nordic beliefs (MACKAIL, I, pp. 333-4). During his years at Oxford he had passionately studied B. Thorpe's book, *Northern Mythology*, in which the myth of the *ragna rök* is made the subject of a deep analysis. Nevertheless, I think it would be going too far to regard it as an essential inspiration in Morris's revolutionary thinking, as Karl Litzenberg does in his article *The Social Philosophy of William Morris and the Doom of the Gods*, going so far as to write: "Morris's ideal for the future, in its method of attainment, and in its result, is almost identical with the Doom of the Gods, the *ragna rök*, of the Elder and Younger Eddas" (*Language and Literature*, University of Michigan Press, vol. X, 1933, p. 184).
12. *The Beauty of Life*, 1880, Nonesuch, pp. 538-9.
13. *An Address to the Kyrle Society, Nottingham*, 1881, May MORRIS, I, p. 199.
14. *Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 393.
15. "No, rather than art should live this poor thin life among a few exceptional men, despising those beneath them for an ignorance for which they themselves are responsible, for a brutality that they will not struggle with, – rather than this, I would that the world should indeed sweep away all art for a while. . ." (*The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 515). – "It would be far better for us to accept the other alternative, the frank rejection of art. . ." (*Art and the Beauty of the Earth*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 165).
16. ". . . Art must go under. . ." (To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 17 January 1882, *Letters*, p. 157). A striking form of the barbaric degradation of our civilisation seemed to lie, in Morris's eyes, in the loss of all sense of history and respect for the past, such as was evinced, for example, in the misguided "restoration" of ancient monuments, in "those acts of barbarism which the modern architect, parson, and squire call restoration". (Letter to *The Athenaeum*, 5 March 1877, *Letters*, p. 85).
17. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 500.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 501. In 1882, similarly, he wrote: ". . . the field of art may have to lie fallow for a while that the weeds may be known for what they are, and be burnt in the end" (*The Lesser Arts of Life*, MACMILLAN, p. 178).
19. *The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, pp. 502 and 515.
20. ". . . The more and more obvious death of art before it rises again. . ." (29 August 1882, *Letters*, p. 161); ". . . the arts have got to die, what is left of them, before they can be born again" (21 August 1880, *ibid.*, p. 180).
21. "Lastly, I am so confident that this equality will be gained, that I am prepared to accept as a consequence of the process of that gain, the seeming disappearance of what art is now left us; because I am sure that it will be but a temporary loss, to be followed by a genuine new birth of art, which will be the spontaneous expression of the pleasure of life innate in the whole people" (*The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle*, 1893, *Letters*, p. 356; May MORRIS, II, p. 522).
22. See below, chap. IV.
23. "The Worker's Share of Art", *Commonweal*, April 1885, pp. 18/II, 19/I.
24. "The Development of Modern Society", *Commonweal*, 19 July 1890, p. 225/II, 226/I; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 25. Cf. ENGELS: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ch. II.
25. "Now in the Midmark itself were many Houses of men; for by that word they had called for generations those who dwelt together under one token of kinship" (*The House of the Wolfings*, C.W., XIV, p. 4). Cf. ENGELS, *op. cit.*, p. 160, n.1.
26. ". . . Descent in the Gens was traced wholly through the mother, and. . . consequently the women were the recognised predominant element therein. . ." (*Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 26). Cf. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*, p. 226/I; ENGELS, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
27. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 25;



ENGELS, *op. cit.*, *passim*. See also: *The House of the Wolfings*, p. 5 (“...the men of one House might not wed the women of their own House: to the Wolfing men all Wolfing women were as sisters: they must needs wed with the Hartings or the Elkings or the Bearings, or such Houses of the Mark as were not so close akin to the blood of the Wolf; and this was a law that none dreamed of breaking”); *The Roots of the Mountains*, p. 16 (“She was of the kindred with whom the chiefs and the great men of the Face most wedded, which was indeed far away kindred of them”).

28. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, pp. 25-6. Engels indicates (*op. cit.*, p. 94) that until the publication of Morgan’s book *Ancient Society* (1877), there was total confusion between the *gens* and the tribe and that exogamy and endogamy had given rise to ludicrous interpretations. Now Morris appears not to have known of Morgan, and, as he was dealing with these matters in 1886, it seems difficult to imagine that he could have drawn his knowledge from anyone other than Engels, either directly or indirectly. However, it must be noticed that his exposition of gentile society was less complete than that of Engels, who established the series: gens – phratry – tribe – confederation of tribes – people. (*Op. cit.*, particularly pp. 97-104).
29. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*; *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 24; *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, p. 300; ENGELS, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
30. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*; ENGELS, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 115.
31. “...According as such councils (which they called Things) were of the House or of the Midmark or of the whole Folk, they were held at the due Thing-Steads in the Wood aloof from either acre or meadow (as was the custom of our forefathers for long after) and at such Things would all the men of the House or the Midmark or the Folk be present man by man” (*The House of the Wolfings*, C.W., XIV, p. 7).
32. “As to a meeting-place, were there any small matters between man and man, these would the Alderman or one of the Wardens deal with, sitting in Court with the neighbours on the wide space just outside the Gate: but if it were to do with greater matters, such as manslayings and blood-wites or the making of war or the ending of it, or the choosing of the Alderman and Wardens, such matters must be put off to the Folkmote, which could but be held in the place aforesaid where was the Doom-ring and the Altar of the Gods; and at that Folkmote both the Shepherd-Folk and the Woodland-Carles foregathered with the Dalesmen, and duly had their say” (*The Roots of the Mountains*, C.W., XV, p. 9).
33. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*; Cf. ENGELS, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
34. Jessie KOCMANOVA: *The Aesthetic Purpose of William Morris in the Context of his Late Prose Romances*, pp. 99-107.
35. “I am reminded here, by the by, of the German professor who, after the Wolfings came out, wrote and asked learned questions about the Mark, expecting, I fear, equally learned answers from our Poet who sometimes dreamed realities without having documentary evidence of them” (C.W., XIV, p. XXV).
36. “Disinterested and unwelcome homage was paid to the book from another point of view. Soon after it had appeared, a friend found Morris in one of his explosive moments after a letter he had received from a “fool of a German”. The writer, a distinguished archaeologist, said that he had hitherto regarded himself as being acquainted with all the *quellen* in existence, from which knowledge might be drawn with regard to Teutonic life in its later tribal stage, when the Romans held Gaul, but that he now found himself in the presence of higher learning that reduced him to humility. He therefore begged his honoured, illustrious and most erudite colleague to indicate the newly found *quellen* to which alone he could attribute the miraculous and never-to-be-overpraised fullness and accuracy of the redintegration before him. ‘Doesn’t the fool realize,’ demanded Morris at the top of his voice, “that it’s a romance, a work of fiction – that it’s all LIES! Hasn’t the pedantic ass

ever heard of creative imagination, or known as artist of any kind? . . . *Ex pede Herculeum*, don't you know? . . . Just as old Owen could fill out an extinct bird with only a bone or two to go upon, an artist who knows his business can fill out an epoch on the strength of half a dozen details. . . Well, more than half a dozen, but all the same. . .!" (H. Halliday SPARLING: *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master-Craftsman*, p. 50).

37. "Yet this much I will say: if our civilization is to carry us no further, to nothing better, I for one wish we had never gone so far; and there must be many of the same mind: rather than we should never be older than we are, I would we had all together been shepherds or what not among the hills and valleys; men with little knowledge, but desiring much; rough men if you please but not brutal; with some sort of art among them, genuine at least and spontaneous; men who could be moved by poetry and story; working hard yet not without leisure; getting drunk sometimes, quarrelling sometimes, even to dry blows; nay if the times were heroic enough sometimes with point and edge: neither malicious nor over soft-hearted; well pleased to live and ready to die – in short, men, free and equal" (*Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, 1880-81, May MORRIS, II, 70-1).
38. *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 635.
39. *Early England*, 1886, LE MIRE, p. 163.
40. Cf. ENGELS, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-8; for example: "Their individual ability and courage, their sense of freedom, their democratic instinct which in everything of public concern felt itself concerned. . . what else were they than the characteristics of the barbarian of the upper stage – fruits of his gentile constitution?" (p. 177).
41. *The House of the Wolfings*, C.W., XIV, p. 145.
42. 17 November 1888, *Letters*, p. 302.
43. *The House of the Wolfings*, *ibid.*, pp. 45-6.
44. ". . . I must, at least, try to make you understand that the whole of the duties of a freeman in this society had reference to the community of which he formed a part, and that he had no interests but the interest of the community; the assertion of any such private interests would have been looked upon as a crime, or rather a monstrosity, hardly possible to understand" (*The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*).
45. "In this early period the individual is so far from feeling no responsibility to the community, that all his responsibilities have relation to the community" (*Ibid.*)
46. ". . . Every freeman had to take his share of responsibility for carrying on the business of the community" (*Early England*, 1886, LE MIRE, p. 166).
47. "Since an Eagle could not marry an Eagle, the Eagles must either get their wives by violent robbery. . . or have some other society at hand into which they could marry, and who could marry into their society. It used to be thought that the violent robbery was the method, but I believe that the second was the one used" (*The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*).
48. *The House of the Wolfings*, C.W., XIV, p. 170.
49. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 21.
50. *The Roots of the Mountains*, C.W., XV, p. 11.
51. "The Promise of May", *Justice*, 1st May 1896, p. 5/II; May MORRIS, II, p. 361.
52. ". . . the healthy barbarism out of which our present society has grown. . ." (*The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 85).
53. "Unheard-of peoples thrusting on into Europe; nation mingling with nation, and blood with blood; the old classical exclusiveness is gone for ever" (*The History of Pattern-Designing*, 1879, MACMILLAN, p. 155).
54. ". . . The chief element of life that it gave expression to was freedom – the freedom of the many – in the realm of art at least" (*Ibid.*, p. 165).
55. "The period of barbarism or disorder was long doubtless, but the new order rose out of it at last bright and clear" (*Architecture and History*, 1884, May MORRIS, I,

- p. 130).
56. "Did the world go back. . . when the remnants of the ancient civilizations were overwhelmed by the barbarism which was the foundation of modern Europe? We can all see that it did not" (*The Arts and Crafts of To-day*, 1889, JACKSON, p. 241).
  57. It is to the point to observe in passing that the same idea is expressed by Engels (*op. cit.*, pp. 171 and 178): "Only barbarians," he writes, "are able to rejuvenate a world in the throes of collapsing civilization." (p. 178).
  58. *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, pp. 635-6.
  59. *Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, 1880 or '81, May MORRIS, II, p. 68.
  60. *Art and Socialism*, *ibid.*, p. 635.
  61. "The Development of Modern Society", *Commonweal*, 16 August 1889, p. 261/I.
  62. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 109.
  63. *Art and Socialism*, *ibid.*, p. 636.
  64. *The Development of Modern Society*, *ibid.*
  65. *Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, *ibid.*, p. 68.
  66. *Individualism at the Royal Academy*, May MORRIS, II, p. 142.
  67. Clearly we are not taking into account here the anti-religious aspect of the myth of the "noble savage" and, in particular, its implicit criticism of the dogma of the Fall. I readily accept that this rationalist content, of undeniable significance, is of great importance, but my approach is on a different level.
  68. *The History of Pattern-Designing*, 1879, MACMILLAN, p. 165.
  69. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 168.
  70. One can well imagine what William Morris's reaction would have been in the face of atomic or thermonuclear terrorism!
  71. *The Aims of Art*, 1886, Nonesuch, pp. 601-2.
  72. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 123.
  73. *Equality*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 201.
  74. K. MARX: *Introduction to the Hegelian Philosophy of Right, Selected Essays*, pp. 15-6.
  75. See below, chap. X.
  76. ENGELS, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
  77. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
  78. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
  79. *The Arts and Crafts of To-day*, 1889, JACKSON, pp. 241-2.

### Part III, Chapter II

1. W. B. YEATS: "The Happiest of Poets", *The Fortnightly Review*, March 1903, p. 539.
2. *The Aims of Art*, 1886, Nonesuch, p. 588.
3. *The Depression of Trade*, 1885, LE MIRE, p. 134.
4. "Ease and happiness, which, believe me, is the birthright of every man. . ." (*ibid.*, p. 135).
5. "What is the object of Revolution? Surely to make people happy. Revolution having brought its foredoomed change about, how can you prevent the counter-revolution from setting in except by making people happy?" (*News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 86).
6. "The Reward of Labour", *Commonweal*, 28 May 1887, p. 171/II.
7. I shall be content, as is my unfailing habit, to refer to Morris's own evidence. On 9 January 1896, only nine months before his death, the poet replied to an American correspondent who had asked whether he had changed his mind about Socialism: "I have *not* changed my mind on Socialism". The italics are Morris's. (MACKAIL, II, p. 292).



8. George Duveau notes that "Plato, like More, was a disappointed man, but his disappointment came from inability to act, whereas More was disillusioned with action". (*Sociologie de l'Utopie*, p. 6). If this assertion is true of Plato and More, it could not be so of Morris, who lived in a period when the prospect of a transformation of society had become historically possible.
9. See below, p. 515.
10. *The Aims of Art*, *ibid.*, p. 588-9.
11. *Letters*, p. 132.
12. "...Surely one day making will be thought more honourable, more worthy the majesty of a great nation than destruction" (*The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 260).
13. "I will never accept the counsels of despair, but will believe that the good time is on the road" (*Speech at a Meeting of the Kyrle Society*, 1881, May MORRIS, I, p. 197).
14. "I think those days will come, wild as the prophecy seems" (*Mr. Morris on Art Matters*, *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 October 1882; reprinted by The William Morris Society, p. 7).
15. "We who once were fools and dreamers then shall be the brave and wise" (*All for the Cause, Chants for Socialists*, p. 9). Similarly, he wrote: "...true it is a dream; but dreams have before now come about of things so good and necessary to us, that we scarcely think of them more than of the daylight, though once people had to live without them, without even the hope of them" (*The Lesser Arts*, 1877, Nonesuch, p. 516).
16. *Justice and Socialism*, 1885, Abramsky Collection. See Appendix I, p. 579.
17. "Indeed for my part though I find much stupidity and more ignorance in the world, I find but little malice" (Letter to the Rev. Oswald Birchall, 7 November 1887, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 374).
18. W. Scawen BLUNT: *My Diaries*, p. 229. Which is why one can only regard with scepticism the entry of 2 June 1891: "With Morris too, whom I again saw much of, I found the same political despondency. He had just published his "News from Nowhere". The picture he draws in it of social communism is pretty, but he, too, is not very hopeful of its ever coming true" (*Ibid.*, pp. 52-3).
19. Letter to W. Manson, 23 January 1881, Walthamstow Mss, J. 532. Mackail, who quotes fragments of this letter (II, pp. 92-3) dates it 1883, despite the evidence of the original, and this would seem more probable, Rossetti having died on 9 April 1882.
20. 15 August 1869, B.M. Add. Mss. 45 342; cf. Philip HENDERSON: *William Morris, his Life, Work and Friends*, p. 104.
21. "Mrs. Morris too was a great dreamer, and they used to compare notes together" (*Memorials of G. B. J.*, II, p. 6); see also Oswald DOUGHTY: *A Victorian Romantic* . . . , p. 355.
22. To Mrs. Coronio, Summer 1876 (*Letters*, p. 78). May Morris dates this letter during the month of March (C.W., XII, p. VII).
23. To Jane Alice Morris, 21 May 1886, *ibid.*, p. 254. Philip Henderson, who has little sympathy for Morris's political ideas, solemnly explains in a note that this dream meant that Morris feared that socialism might become a reality in his lifetime!
24. *A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, pp. 198-9.
25. *News from Nowhere*, *ibid.*, p. 132.
26. "Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (*News from Nowhere*, *ibid.*, p. 197).
27. "...But suddenly I saw as it were a black cloud rolling along to meet me, like a nightmare of my childish days; and for a while I was conscious of nothing else than being in the dark, and whether I was walking, or sitting, or lying down, I could not tell" (*ibid.*).

28. John Ball says to his visitor: "Thou hast been a dream to me as I to thee" (*A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, p. 265).
29. *Letters*, p. 328.
30. C.W., II, p. XVII.
31. Stopford, A. BROOKE: *Four Poets*, p. 258.
32. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1896, Nonesuch, p. 657.
33. *The Society of the Future*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 463.
34. "... Sometimes when I am idle and doing nothing, pleasant visions go past me of the things that may be", he wrote in 1851 in a letter to his mother (*Letters*, p. 16).
35. *Journals of Travel in Iceland*, 1871-1873, C.W., VIII, p. 168.
36. *Letters*, p. 275.
37. To Mrs. Alfred Baldwin, 22 October 1873, *ibid.*, p. 59.
38. May MORRIS, I, p. 439.
39. "I do so hate. . . everything vague in politics as well as in art" (MACKAIL, II, p. 8). This need for precision has been neatly summarised by Francis Meynell: "Morris believed in design. He wanted society to be designed, he wanted economics to be designed, just as he wanted chairs, curtains, books to be designed – not to be left to haphazard competition and greed" (*Appreciations*, p. 27).
40. To Mrs. Burne-Jones, 31 October 1885, *Letters*, p. 242.
41. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 4.
42. *The Beauty of Life*, 1880, Nonesuch, p. 564.
43. *The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization*, 1881, JACKSON, p. 272.
44. "And o'er the weltering tangle a glimmering light is shed" (*The Day is Coming, Chants for Socialists*, 1885, p. 5; C.W., IX, p. 181).
45. "When once we see the light of life / Gleam through the tangle of to-day" (*Drawing near the Light*, 1888, C.W., IX, p. 188).
46. "... And the knowledge of their progress cannot fail to rouse our imaginations into picturing for ourselves that life at once happy and manly which we *know* social revolution will put within the reach of all men" (*A Factory as it Might Be*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 646).
47. "When happy dreams have just gone by,  
And left us without remedy  
Within the un pitying hands of life" (*The Earthly Paradise*, p. 217).
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-6.
49. "I walked along with the others musing as if I did not belong to them" (*A Dream of John Ball*, Nonesuch, p. 237).
50. "I stammered as I yea-said him; for John Ball was looking strangely at me with a half-smile, and my heart beat anxiously and fearfully. . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 241).
51. "I felt anxious to speak to my companion, and withal I felt that I must hasten, or for some reason or other I should be too late" (*Ibid.*, p. 263).
52. "... They asked me a great many questions about the country I came from and the manners of life there, which I found rather puzzling to answer; and doubtless what answers I did give were puzzling enough to them" (*News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 160).
53. "... I should like to have gone on talking with the older man, who could understand something at least of my wonted ways of looking at life, whereas, with the younger people, in spite of all their kindness, I really was a being from another planet" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).
54. "... I rather felt as if the old man, with his knowledge of past times, and even a kind of inverted sympathy for them caused by his active hatred of them, was as it were a blanket for me against the cold of this very new world, where I was, so to say, stripped bare of every habitual thought and way of acting" (*Ibid.*, p. 96).
55. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
59. "The only weight I had upon my heart was a vague fear as it drew toward bedtime concerning the place where I should wake in the morrow. . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 132).
60. ". . . 'If we must lose you, I want you to see all that you can see first before you go back again.' – 'Lose me?' I said – 'go back again? Am I not to go up to the North with you? What do you mean?' – She smiled somewhat sadly, and said: 'Not yet; we will not talk of that yet. . .'" (*Ibid.*, p. 191).
61. ". . . and with one look at Ellen I turned and went with Dick, doubting, if I must say the truth, whether I should see her again" (*Ibid.*, p. 192).
62. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
64. A. L. Morton, responsive to this human quality of Morris's utopia, remarks: "More can move us by his account of enclosures but not by his account of Utopia" (*The English Utopia*, p. 71).
65. Owen CARROLL: "William Morris among the Reds", *Everyman*, 23 September 1933, p. 351/II.
66. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 151.
67. J. W. MACKAIL, *An Address*. . . n.p.
68. Introduction to the (Aubier) bilingual edition of *Nouvelles de nulle part*, p. 19.
69. All the same, let me quote the opinion of Edouard Guyot: ". . . it is as poet and artist much more than as politician and sociologist that Morris sees the future. Suppress all that is bad and ugly in modern society and replace it with things that delight both heart and mind, that, according to him, is what is needed. The earth must be given back its charm and freshness, all labour must become a work of art that the labourer will love – and that is all" (*L'Idée Socialiste chez William Morris*, p. 94).
70. H. M. HYNDMAN: *The Record of an Adventurous Life*, p. 361; *Letters*, p. 331.
71. Letter to Dr. John Glasse, 17 February 1890, published by R. Page ARNOT: *William Morris, the Man and the Myth*, p. 104.
72. To Bruce Glasier, 7 October 1890, *Letters*, p. 328.
73. "News from Nowhere is already printed in America, and I am going to print it here for a shilling" (To Bruce Glasier, 3 December 1890, *Letters*, p. 330). Morris does not appear ever to have been put out or worried by the fact that this American edition was a pirate one.
74. "News from Nowhere, yes, I did authorize it to someone recommended by the party; Bebel, I think. As to *John Ball* I do not think I have, and you are welcome to it, and I should be glad if you would do so" (To Andreas Scheu, 18 September 1893, *Letters*, p. 355). – In fact, it was Liebknecht's wife who translated *News from Nowhere* into German. On 27 March 1896, Liebknecht, hearing of Morris's failing health, wrote him a warm and friendly letter which ended with the words: "Au revoir, dear Morris! My wife, who translated your splendid 'News from Nowhere' sends her love." (B.M. Add. Mss. 45 345).
75. "He was immensely pleased when I told him that I had read his *News from Nowhere*, and that Ann also had read it" (W. Scawen BLUNT: *My Diaries*, p. 55); "He read us out several of his poems. . . He did it as if he were throwing a bone to a dog, at the end of each piece breaking off with 'There, that's it', as much as to say, 'You may take it or leave it as you please'." (*Ibid.*, p. 57).
76. ". . . we then adjourned to the Socialist meeting, where he read the conversational chapters in *News from Nowhere*." (Sydney Cockerell's *Diaries*, 2 August 1891, B.M. Add. Mss. 52 722 (24).)
77. *News from Nowhere*, p. 126.
78. "Yet, slight and fantastic as it is, it has been translated into three European languages, and has probably spread the knowledge of Morris as a Socialist more



widely than all his other writings." (J. W. MACKAIL: *An Address*. . . n.p.) – See also MACKAIL, II, p. 243.

79. "Socialism and Millthorpe, I need hardly say, swept me out of these academic and semi-political surroundings into a different world – the world of a new society which was arising and forming within the structure of the old. William Morris represented this new society more effectively and vitally than anyone else of that period; because away and beyond the scientific forecast he gave expression to the emotional presentment and ideal of a sensible free human brotherhood – as in *John Ball*, or *News from Nowhere*." (Edward CARPENTER: *My Days and Dreams*, p. 216).
80. "*News from Nowhere* made me a Socialist; and I have never had cause to regret either the fact or the manner of my conversion." (G. D. H. COLE: *Revaluations*, p. 133). See also his lecture, *William Morris as a Socialist*, p. 1.
81. Bruce GLASIER, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
82. C. Desmond GREAVES: *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, p. 37.
83. Dona TORR: *Tom Mann and his Times*, pp. 186-93.
84. *Of the Popular or Decorative Arts*, May MORRIS, II, p. 63.
85. "...a reflection from that peace of the future will illumine the turmoil and trouble of our lives, whether the trouble be seemingly petty, or obviously tragic; and we shall, in our hopes at least, live the lives of men. . ." (*Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 623). – Bruce Glasier recounts this saying of Morris: "Were it not for my work and the hope of Socialism, I believe life would be positively unendurable to me." (*Op. cit.*, p. 91).
86. "Every age has had its hopes, hopes that look to something beyond the life of the age itself, hopes that try to pierce into the future; and, strange to say, I believe that those hopes have been stronger not in the heyday of the epoch which has given them birth, but rather in its decadence and times of corruption. . ." (*The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, Signs, p. 84).
87. "...if in these days there were no great ideal ahead of us, no hope for a life on earth better than the earth has yet seen, . . . then all the promises and hopes for progress are mere delusions and lies." (*Misery and the Way Out*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 163).
88. "...the economical changes which are in progress must be accompanied by corresponding developments of men's aspirations." (*A Factory as it Might Be*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 646).
89. "...the ideal; which, after all, we must all of us more or less form in our minds when we have once fixed our belief in the regeneration of the world." (*The Society of the Future*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 460).
90. *Monopoly, or How Labour is Robbed*, 1887, JACKSON, p. 200.
91. "'ideals'. . . are mostly attempts by persons of strong hope to embody their discontent with the present." (*The Socialist Ideal*, C.W., XXIII, p. 258).
92. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1896, Nonesuch, p. 659.
93. *Some Hints on Pattern Designing*, 1881, C.W., XXII, p. 176.
94. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, 1893, p. 321.
95. *Misery and the Way Out*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 164.
96. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 197.
97. *Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 113.
98. "Correspondence", *Commonweal*, 25 February 1888, p. 61/II.
99. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 278.
100. *A Factory as it Might Be*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 646.
101. *Appreciations*. . . , p. 17.
102. "No amount of preaching, or enthusiasm, or of devotion even, will induce the workers, with whom the world's future lies, to accept and to act upon mere abstract propositions of what they have a right to aspire to; necessity must push

them on before they can even conceive of the future of equality and mutual good-will which we *know* awaits them. . . Necessity only can make them conscious of this struggle." ("Is Trade Recovering?", *Commonweal*, 18 December 1886, p. 300/I).

103. *The End and the Means*, 1886, May MORRIS, II, p. 420.
104. "On Some 'Practical' Socialists", *Commonweal*, 18 February 1888, p. 52/II.
105. See above, pp. 41-2.
106. Thomas BINNING: "Practical Socialists", Correspondence, *Commonweal*, 25 February 1888, p. 61/II.
107. "The Policy of the Socialist League", *Commonweal*, 9 June 1888, p. 180/I-II.
108. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 114.
109. *Equality*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, pp. 197-8.
110. *How Shall We Live Then?* 1889, . I.I.S.G., p. 7.
111. *The Society of the Future*, May MORRIS, II, p. 454.
112. *The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, p. 451.
113. Raymond RUYER: *L'Utopie et les utopies*, p. 9.
114. Bruce GLASIER: *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement*, p. 87.
115. See above, p. 14.
116. H. G. WELLS: *Marriage*, p. 256
117. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 181.
118. R. Page ARNOT: *The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain*, p. 155. The author declares in a footnote that he himself heard Steffens utter these words.

### Part III, Chapter III

1. To William Allingham, 18 April 1883, *Letters*, p. 170.
2. To C. E. Maurice, 22 June 1883, *ibid.*, p. 175.
3. To Charles Rowley, 25 October 1883, *ibid.*, p. 189.
4. To the Rev. George Bainton, 2 April 1888, *ibid.*, p. 282.
5. *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 659. Walter Crane relates this remark of Morris: "Settle the economic question and you settle all other questions. It is the Aaron's rod which swallows up the rest" (Walter CRANE: *William Morris to Whistler*, p. 12).
6. To the Rev. George Bainton, 2 April 1888, *Letters*, p. 283.
7. To Robert Thompson, 24 July 1884, *ibid.*, p. 207.
8. *Manifesto of the Socialist League*, THOMPSON, p. 851.
9. *Letters*, pp. 283-4.
10. "...The means of production, to be *owned* by no individual but used by all as occasion called for its use" (*How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 583).
11. I shall be content with a brief selection, the interest of which lies in the diversity of publications and dates: "The intelligent determination of the workers to put an end to wage-slavery and capitalism by nationalizing all the means of production and exchange is the one thing necessary for carrying on a *civilized* revolution" ("Socialism in England in 1884", *Justice*, 9 August 1884, p. 4/II; May MORRIS, II, p. 148); "All Socialists who can be considered to have any claim to that title agree in putting forward the necessity of transforming the means of production from individual into common property" (*The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, p. 434); "...handing over the management of the whole natural resources of the country, together with the machinery for using them, into the power of the Combined Workers. . ." (*News from Nowhere*, 1890, Nonesuch, pp. 102-3); "The resources of nature therefore, and the wealth used for the produc-

tion of further wealth, the plant and stock in short, should be communized" (*Communism*, 1893, *ibid.*, p. 667); "...the assumption by the community of all the means of production and exchange, to wit, the land, the mines, the railways, the factories, etc., and the credit establishments of the country" (*Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, 1893, p. 280).

12. *The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, p. 434.
13. *Monopoly, or How Labour is Robbed*, 1887, JACKSON, p. 207.
14. *The Day is Coming, Chants for Socialists*, p. 4.
15. *News from Nowhere*, Nonesuch, p. 72.
16. *A Dream of John Ball*, *ibid.*, p. 219. Cf.: "Nor shall half be reaped for nothing by him that sowed no seed" (*The Day is Coming, Chants for Socialists*, p. 4).
17. "If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, or organise itself as a class; if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class" (MARX and ENGELS: *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 35).
18. *Art and the People*, 1883, May MORRIS, II, p. 402.
19. *Art under Plutocracy*, 1883, JACKSON, p. 139.
20. Cf. *Capital*, p. 96, n. 2.
21. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 121.
22. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 173.
23. "To Blackwell", Correspondence, *Commonweal*, 18 May 1889, p. 157/I.
24. *Art and Socialism*, 1884, Nonesuch, pp. 642-3.
25. See below, pp. 493-6.
26. To William Allingham, 26 November 1884, *Letters*, p. 216.
27. MARX and ENGELS: *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 32.
28. *Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 116.
29. *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 193.
30. *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1894, Nonesuch, p. 574.
31. *News from Nowhere*, *ibid.*, p. 75.
32. *Architecture and History*, 1884, C.W., XXII, p. 316.
33. "...The furthering of the class struggle till all classes are abolished" (*The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 103).
34. "Notes on News", *Commonweal*, 28 September 1889, p. 305/II.
35. *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 184-5.
36. *Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 610.
37. *Art and Labour*, 1884, LE MIRE, p. 117.
38. *At a Picture Show*, 1884, May MORRIS, II, p. 418.
39. *Makeshift*, 1894, May MORRIS, II, p. 483.
40. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, pp. 109-10.
41. To the Rev. George Bainton, 2 April 1888, *Letters*, p. 284.
42. *The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, p. 435.
43. *Communism*, 1893, Nonesuch, p. 669. Similarly he writes: "...those who developed the greatest share of certain qualities not necessarily the most useful to the community, would gain a superior position from which they would be able to force the less gifted to serve them" (*The Policy of Abstention*, *ibid.*).
44. *Communism*, *ibid.*
45. C.W., XX, p. XX.
46. *Fabian Essays*, p. 186.
47. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, p. 280.
48. *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 201.
49. *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, p. 316.



50. THOMPSON, p. 800.

51. Although the passage is well known and easily available, I feel it essential for the clarification of the development of my argument to reproduce it here. One cannot fail to be struck by the similarity of the ideas expressed by Marx and by Morris, not only in the estimate made of the first stage, but also in the vision of communist society in its higher stage, as we shall discover in later chapters. Here, then, is Marx's text:

"What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as if it had *developed on a basis of its own*, but on the contrary as *it emerges from capitalist society*, which is thus in every respect tainted economically, morally and intellectually with the hereditary diseases of the old society from whose womb it is emerging. In this way the individual producer receives back again from society, with deductions, exactly what he gives. What he has given to society is his individual amount of labour. For example, the social working-day consists of the sum of the individuals' hours of work. The individual working-time of the individual producer is that part of the social working-day contributed by him, his part thereof. He receives from society a voucher that he has contributed such and such a quantity of work (after deductions from his work for the common fund) and draws through this voucher on the social storehouse as much of the means of consumption as the same quantity of work costs. The same amount of work which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another.

Here obviously the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities so far as this exchange is of equal values. Content and form are changed because under the changed conditions no one can contribute anything except his labour and, on the other hand, nothing can pass into the possession of individuals except individual objects of consumption. But, so far as the distribution of the latter among individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity-equivalents, i.e. equal quantities of labour in one form are exchanged for equal quantities of labour in another form. *The equal right* is here still based on the same principle as bourgeois right, though principle and practice are no longer at daggers drawn, while the exchange of equivalents in commodity exchange only exists *for the average* and not for the individual case.

In spite of this advance, this *equal right* is still continually handicapped by bourgeois limitations. The right of the producers is *proportional* to the amount of labour they contribute; the equality consists in the fact that everything is measured by an *equal measure*, labour.

But one man will excel another physically or intellectually and so contributes in the same time more labour, or can labour for a longer time; and labour, to serve as a measure, must be defined by its duration or intensity, otherwise it ceases to be a standard measure. This *equal right* is an unequal right for unequal work. It recognises no class differences because every worker ranks as a worker like his fellows, but it tacitly recognises unequal individual endowment, and thus capacities for production, as natural privileges. It is therefore a right of inequality in its content, as in general is every right. Right can by its very nature only consist in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal), are only measurable by an equal standard in so far as they can be brought under an equal observation, can be regarded from one *definite* aspect only, e.g. in the case under review, they must be considered *only as workers* and nothing more be seen in them, everything else being ignored. Further, one worker is married, another single, one has more children than another and so on. Given an equal capacity for labour and thence an equal share in the funds for social consumption, the one will in practice receive more than the other, the one will be richer than the other and so forth. To avoid all

these inconveniences, rights must be unequal instead of being equal.

But these deficiencies are unavoidable in the first phase of communist society when it is just emerging after prolonged birth-pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by it.

In a higher phase of communist society, after the tyrannical subordination of individuals according to the distribution of labour, and thereby also the distinction between manual and intellectual work, have disappeared, after labour has become not merely a means to live but is in itself the first necessity of living, after the powers of production have also increased and all the springs of co-operative wealth are gushing more freely together with the all-round development of the individual, then and then only can the narrow bourgeois horizon of rights be left far behind and society will inscribe on its banner: 'From each according to his capacity, to each according to his need.' (Karl MARX: *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, pp. 29-31).

52. "The first phase of Communism, therefore, still cannot produce justice and equality; differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still exist, but the exploitation by one man of many will have become impossible, because it will be impossible to seize, as private property, the means of production, the factories, machines, land, and so on. And so, in the first phase of Communist society (generally called Socialism) "bourgeois justice" is not abolished in its entirety, but only in part, only in proportion to the economic transformation so far attained, that is, only in respect of the means of production" (LENIN: *The State and Revolution*, p. 67).
53. It is not only the theoretical content of the fragment of *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* which we find in Morris, but even certain images. Is it not tempting to put side by side "after prolonged birth-pangs" and "the new order which the old has long carried in its womb"? (*The End and the Means*, May MORRIS, II, p. 421).
54. *The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, pp. 435-7.
55. *True and False Society*, 1886, JACKSON, p. 315.
56. MARX and ENGELS: *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 11.
57. G. Bernard SHAW: *Morris as I Knew Him*, May MORRIS, II, p. IX.
58. "I am speaking for those who are complete Socialists, or let us call them Communists" ("Where Are We Now?", *Commonweal*, 15 November 1890, p. 361/II; May MORRIS, II, p. 517).
59. See below, Chapter V.
60. *The Hopes of Civilization*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 110.
61. "Correspondence", *Commonweal*, 18 May 1889, p. 157/I; May MORRIS, II, p. 314.
62. *Communism* 1893, Nonesuch, p. 662.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 666.
64. JACKSON, pp. 312-5.
65. May MORRIS, II, pp. 435-7.
66. THOMPSON, pp. 854-5.
67. *Justice and Socialism*, 1885, Abramsky Collection, Appendix I, p. 579.
68. "Why I am a Communist", *Liberty*, February 1894, p. 14/II.
69. "It will only be when the first stage which recognizes the principle at least is complete that our present inequalities can be, I won't say abolished, but even much palliated" (To the Rev. George Bainton, 10 April 1888, *Letters*, p. 288).
70. *Communism*, 1893, Nonesuch, p. 668.
71. *The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, p. 436.
72. *Socialism, its Growth and Outcome*, 1893, p. 286.
73. *Whigs, Democrats and Socialists*, 1886, *Signs*, p. 52.
74. *How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 580.

75. *Dawn of a New Epoch*, 1885, *Signs*, p. 192.
76. "To Blackwell", Correspondence, *Commonweal*, 18 May 1889, p. 157/11.
77. *Our Country Right or Wrong?* 1880, May MORRIS, II, p. 60.
78. Here are a few typical examples: "He will do effectively what work is required of him according to his capacity, and of the produce of that work he will have what he needs" (*How We Live and How We Might Live*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 577). "All must work according to their ability, and so produce what they consume – that is, each man should work as well as he can for his own livelihood, and his livelihood should be assured to him; that is to say, all the advantages which society would provide for each and all of its members" (*Useful Work versus Useless Toil*, 1884, Nonesuch, p. 611). "... As all must consume wealth so all shall produce wealth" (*The Depression of Trade*, 1885, LE MIRE, p. 132). "... the due exercise of one's energies for the common good and capacity for personal use we say form the only claims for the possession of wealth..." (*The Policy of Abstention*, 1887, May MORRIS, II, p. 436). "In short, the maxim which true Socialism would carry out is 'From each what he can do; to each what he needs' " (*Socialism*, 1885, May MORRIS, II, p. 195). "... a condition of society in which every one is able to satisfy his needs in return for the due exercise of his capacities for the benefit of the race" (*Letters*, 1888, p. 282). "... The aim of true society, which I must now again assert to be the satisfaction of the wants of everybody in the community in return for the exercise of their faculties for the benefit of the community. Or as the formula of the Communists has it: To *every one* according to his needs, *from every one* according to his capacities" (*Equality*, 1888, May MORRIS, II, p. 201).





















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